

• Emma • Jane • Worboise •

• Lady •
• Clarissa •



2/8

Mary Donaghue
a birthday present
from her Sister
February 6th 94

LADY CLARISSA.

LADY CLARISSA

BY

EMMA JANE WORBOISE,

*Author of "Father Fabian," "Overdale," "Nobly Born," "Grey and Gold,"
"Oliver Westwood," "Husbands and Wives," &c., &c.*

"These thorns are sharp, yet I can tread on them;
This cup is loathsome, yet He makes it sweet;
My face is stedfast towards Jerusalem—
My heart remembers it.

"Beauty for ashes, oil of joy for grief,
Garment of praise for spirit of heaviness;
Although to-day I fade as doth a leaf,
I languish and grow less.

"Although to-day I walk in tedious ways,
To-day His staff is turned into a rod,
Yet will I wait for Him the appointed days,
And stay upon my God."

Christina Rossetti.

TENTH THOUSAND.

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CONTENTS.



CHAPTER	PAGE
I. The Prologue	1
II. Motherless	12
III. The Earl's Alternative	23
IV. Mrs. Shrosbery	33
V. "On Her Best Behaviour"	43
VI. A Wedding-Day in January	54
VII. All Alone in the Wood	64
VIII. In Durance Vile	75
IX. A Domestic Tournament	86
X. Father and Daughter.....	97
XI. "The Oddest Child in the World".....	103
XII. Throwing Down the Gauntlet	120
XIII. "It is My Duty"	130
XIV. The Son and Heir	142
XV. Not Jealous	153
XVI. Late Repentance.....	162
XVII. Unexpected, but Delightful	173
XVIII. The Countess at Home	184
XIX. A Morning of Surprises.....	195
XX. Another Step-Daughter.....	205
XXI. A Friend at Last.....	216
XXII. Momento Mori.....	227

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIII. A Blood Relation	237
XXIV. On the Southbourne Shore	249
XXV. On the Mere-Side	260
XXVI. The Huntsman's Leap	271
XXVII. Medicine and Law.....	281
XXVIII. Passing Away.....	292
XXIX. A Legal Interview.....	302
XXX. Susan and Clarissa	313
XXXI. The Young Earl.....	324
XXXII. Coming to an Understanding	332
XXXIII. The Summer-House	343
XXXIV. Light at Evening-Time	354
XXXV. "Nothing Left to Love"	366
XXXVI. What was Written in the Book of Fate	379
XXXVII. The Renewal of Hope	389
XXXVIII. A Last Appeal	401
XXXIX. On the Eve of Departure	412
XL. On the Journey	423
XLI. "The Mermaid"	435
XLII. Hue and Cry	446
XLIII. Miss Clara Leigh	456
XLIV. Gleams of Sunshine	467
XLV. Clarissa Tells Her Story	478
XLVI. Adelaide's Previsions	488
XLVII. "Sing Small, Loo, Sing Small!"	493
XLVIII. Homeward Bound	509
XLIX. A Miserable Woman.....	520
L. Mrs. Jack Sparks	531
LI. Shades of Evening	542

LADY CLARISSA.

CHAPTER I.

THE PROLOGUE.

“ He compassed her with sweet observances
And worship, never leaving her, and grew
Forgetful of his promise to the king,
Forgetful of the falcon and the hunt,
Forgetful of the tilt and tournament,
Forgetful of his glory and his name,
Forgetful of his earldom and its cares.”

“ If thou wilt prove me, dear,
Woman’s love no fable,
I —— will love thee half a year,
As a man is able.”

THE bells were ringing merrily in the ancient ivied tower of Orwell Church one bright summer evening—we will not say how many years ago. You might have known, had you been there to listen, that it was no common peal ringing out so grandly and sweetly over the well-wooded meads, and green flowery vales, and pleasant lanes of Orwell Magna and its neighbourhood. They were wedding bells that awoke the echoes and filled all the soft, blue air with silvery, resonant music on that exquisite June evening; and if the old tower had been silent, or empty of those jubilant voices, no one, however dull his perceptions, could have failed to divine that something had happened, or was about to happen, of no ordinary moment to the crowds assembled in the churchyard, on the village-green, in the village street, and especially near the

grand embattled gateway, which was the state entrance to Orwell Park, and which was now wreathed with garlands of evergreens and flowers, and ornamented with flags, and streamers, and banners in all manner of gay devices. At the entrance of the village was a triumphal arch; all the inhabitants were out in their very best attire; the children of the district had all been scrubbed and brushed up by their zealously tidy mothers till their faces shone and every hair was in its proper place, while they gloried in new hats, bright handkerchiefs and tippets, and perfectly spotless pinafores. For the Earl of Orwell, who was, to all intents and purposes, king of that beautiful region, of which he was lord and master, was bringing home his bride—his newly wedded and, as report averred, his exquisitely beautiful three months' wife—to the stately home of a long line of noble ancestors.

A favoured few of the tenantry were permitted to join the household retainers in welcoming the happy pair in the courtyard of the castle; and there it is, under the frowning walls and battlements of the ancient keep, that our story—or its prologue rather—commences. Mrs. Sweetapple, the housekeeper, had gathered about her some of her chosen friends, the farmers' wives and daughters, whom she had just regaled with rich cakes and tea, and to whom she was graciously extending such information respecting "the family" as seemed expedient in her estimation. A very prudent and sagacious person was Mrs. Sweetapple, of Orwell Castle; she had been in the Orwell service, was her boast, girl and woman, almost forty years, and she had never betrayed the trust, she humbly hoped, so fully bestowed upon her by her superiors; the honour of the Orwells was her honour, their fortunes were her fortunes; and if it had been possible for disgrace to befall persons of station so exalted, she also would have shared their humiliation. On the present auspicious occasion Mrs. Sweetapple was gorgeously arrayed in brocaded dark grey lutestring and rich Mechlin lace, and she wore her large gold watch fixed conspicuously on the outside of her waistband, attached to a curiously-wrought Venetian chain, the present of "my lato lord, on his return from foreign parts." At

her side sat a comely dame, the wife of one of the largest tenant farmers on the Earl's estate. To this lady Mrs. Sweetapple chiefly addressed herself.

"Yes, Mrs. Field, it is, as you remark, a most happy and desirable event; and I was beginning to be half afraid that my lord had taken an aversion to holy matrimony, and that he would be the last Earl of Orwell in the direct line. Why, it is eight years come next October since my lady, the Viscountess, and her little baby-boy were interred in the family vault yonder. She never was Countess, you know, ma'am, because she died before the present Earl succeeded to the title—he was only Lord Fordham in those days."

"Did my lord take his lady's death much to heart, then?"

"Well, I can hardly say. He was terribly cut up at first; but he went away to Italy, and I saw no more of him till he came back post-haste in order to receive the dying commands of my late lord, his father. Lady Fordham was of a very high family, and she was sole heiress to I don't know how many thousands a year."

"And that all went to her husband, of course?"

"Not a bit of it! Family property don't go in that way, Mrs. Field; it keeps in the family always, except under very particular circumstances. If the little heir had lived, *he* would have had the money naturally, for it was all settled on her and her heirs for ever; but dying childless, every penny of it reverted to the next heir—a cousin, I believe, whom she had never seen, and for whom she had no great fancy."

"What a pity the baby didn't live! And was Lady Fordham handsome?"

"Well, no; I cannot say she was. She was not over young either. It was not exactly what one might call 'a marriage of affection.' There was blood and there was money; and the rich old General, her father, and the late Earl, made up the match between them. Not but what my lord was very fond of her, as of course it was his duty to be, and he was the kindest of husbands; but it stands to sense that a man thinks more tenderly of the woman of his own choice than of one chosen for him.

This time his lordship pleases himself, and a very beautiful lady the new Countess is, I am well assured."

"And who is *she*, if I may presume to inquire, Mrs. Sweetapple?"

Mrs. Sweetapple fidgeted a little in her comfortable seat, and glanced around to see if there were any listeners; but all were occupied with their own private chatter, and seemed intent on that. "Well," she answered in a low tone, "I don't mind telling *you*, as a person of discretion, Mrs. Field, that I know nothing whatever of the bride whom my lord is bringing home to-day. Report says she is a great beauty, and quite young, and her name was Grey—Clarissa Grey—and the Earl and she were married at St. George's, Hanover Square, by the Bishop of St. Beetha's, his second cousin, you know, Mrs. Field. But who Miss Grey really was, I assure you I know no more than a post! And I've searched the Red Book through and through, and there are many aristocratic Greys, I find—lots of them, in fact; and some 'de Greys,' the most aristocratic of all; but not one Clarissa among them. It is rather an outlandish sort of name, don't you think, Mrs. Field?"

"I think it is a beautiful name! Why, there was once a Clarissa Harlowe, was there not, a person of distinction?"

"Clarissa Harlowe was only in a novel, Mrs. Field. No such woman ever really lived, or ever could have lived, I should say. I've read 'Clarissa Harlowe,' and 'Sir Charles Grandison,' and 'Tom Jones' all through, which is more than many of my betters can say; but I always did affect polite literature. Give me a clever book and I ask nothing else, unless it be a cup of good green tea, with plenty of cream, or a glass of the old Cyprus wine that Mr. Rumsey makes so much of!"

"Well, I don't read novels; I've too much to do and too much to think about. My mother never liked to see us girls wasting our time over a book. 'Reading's an occupation that's no yield, girls,' I've heard her say often and often. 'Read your Bible, and your "Pilgrim's Progress," and your "Whole Duty of Man," on Sundays,' says she, 'and I don't mind you taking up the "*Elegant*

Extracts" now and then, if you have a headache, and can't sew; but books never did anybody any good yet, and why people should take the trouble to write them, I can't make out!' But that's neither here nor there; Clarissa is a fine name, and one that suits the Countess of Orwell. Only—I did hear—of course, it was only foolish talk! people *will* talk, you know, Mrs. Sweetapple; but my own cousin, Maria, who is married to a topping green-grocer and fruiterer, at the West-end, and keeps her pony Phaeton, and her two maids, declares that the new Countess was nothing better nor worse than private governess in a baronet's family!"

"Foolish talk, indeed! and I hope you won't go and repeat such an absurd story, Mrs. Field. A governess, forsooth! As if the Earl had not the pick of *all* the ladies of quality that are unmarried! A likely thing that he should take up with a young person in that capacity; why, a governess is but an upper servant, when all is said and done. The Oakleighs of Orwell have never yet married beneath themselves. The late Miss Grey was a lady, you may depend upon it, Mrs. Field."

"Don't you think she might be a lady, and yet a governess, Mrs. Sweetapple? It seems to me a governess ought to be a lady, else how should she know how to bring up ladies?"

"Well, she might be, and should be altogether genteel, I grant you; and I've seen a governess before now, *looking* as well-born as the little Lady Jane, or Lady Augusta, that she was paid for teaching. And I should never think of slighting a governess because she had to get her own living; but governesses should marry tutors and curates, and that sort, certainly not peers of the realm! Oh, dear no, Mrs. Field; you may make up your mind it's all sheer nonsense, this tale that your cousin heard—what's vulgarly called 'a cock and bull story,' whatever that may be! My lord has married a lady of rank, you may depend upon it!"

"Very likely! It does not concern me, of course. Only Cousin Maria is a very reliable person, and never gossips, nor talks at random. I never knew her to be wrong."

And in this case "Cousin Maria" justified the dictum of her kinswoman. Clarissa, Countess of Orwell, *née* Grey, was actually a governess in the family of Sir Charles Ridley, when Francis, Earl of Orwell, first beheld her. It was the old, old story; she was beautiful and gentle; he was noble and impressible. He had never fallen in love before, and he was over thirty; Clarissa's lovely face, and the sweet refinement of her character, took his heart by storm. He saw, he admired, he worshipped! Ere he was aware, he was fathoms deep in love, and all his dreams of happiness were centred in the hope of winning her for his wife. He behaved in the most irreproachable manner; he spoke to Sir Charles Ridley at once; he even made a feint of consulting Lady Ridley.

The common fate of governesses—especially those who are blessed or cursed with undoubted personal attractions—was not Clarissa Grey's. The Ridleys had no grown-up daughters of their own, their eldest girl, Clarissa's pupil, being under ten years of age. Sir Charles was extremely good-natured, and his lady, who was as romantic as any schoolgirl, was only too delighted to have a real love affair going on under her roof, and both were quite willing to throw over the lovers the ægis of their sanction and protection. For, as Sir Charles said, "Orwell is certainly old enough to choose for himself, and as he has married once to please his family, it is no more than just that he should marry now to please himself. I dare say we shall be blamed, but I fancy our shoulders are broad enough to bear whatever society may please to lay upon them. It is an imprudent match, no doubt—a *mésalliance*, in fact. What then? There have always been imprudent and unequal matches ever since Adam and Eve came out of Paradise, and Miss Grey is not a woman that any man need be ashamed of. She is tolerably well connected, too, I believe?"

"Oh, yes," replied the lady; "her father was a clergyman, and her mother was a naval officer's daughter. But what is best of all is that she has at present no relations in the world, save her brother, who went out to Mexico or Japan—I am not sure which—many years ago, and has never been heard of since. So Orwell need not fear being

pestered by vulgar and needy relatives; marrying rather lower in the scale than one's self so often involves the most unpleasant collateral consequences. If Miss Grey had a lot of hungry brothers, and sisters, and cousins, in her train, I could not conscientiously advise Orwell to marry her. As it is, he will have a beautiful and amiable wife, whom he will make Countess of Orwell. I shall be quite proud to present her, I assure you. Her beauty is of so uncommon an order, of so patrician a type—in spite of the want of *sang pur* in her veins—that she is sure to make a sensation in the fashionable world. And Grey is such a convenient name; there are all sorts of Greys, you know. When people ask to what family she belongs, I shall answer quite confidently, 'Oh! to the Leicestershire Greys!' And it will be quite true, for her father once held a curacy somewhere in that county."

Thus encouraged by these good people, Lord Orwell proceeded in his wooing, and in due season won his beauteous bride. The wedding took place in town, from Sir Charles' mansion in Portman Square, and was duly celebrated with all requisite ceremonial at St. George's, Hanover Square. And very few people really knew that Lord Orwell had married his friend's governess. Of course, in the present day it would have been speedily known to all whom it might concern, as well as to a great many whom it could not possibly concern; but all this happened, as I mentioned before, a good many years ago, when news travelled slowly, or stayed at home altogether; when the public press was slow and feeble in its entire constitution, and when railways and telegraphs were only dimly portended by the signs of the times. It would be far more difficult now to conduct a strictly private affair in Japan, than it was in those days to transact your business in London without suffering tidings of it to escape to your friends in the Midland or Eastern Counties. Consequently, the good people at Orwell Magna remained in profound ignorance of their new Countess's antecedents till Mrs. Field threw in a light on the subject, which, though welcomed by some who heard it, was received with distaste, if not with absolute incredulity, by Mrs. Sweetapple, and by Mr. Rumsey, the house-steward, who both

held it as a law of the Medes and Persians, which might never be reversed, that the Earls of Orwell were limited, matrimonially, to the daughters, grand-daughters, and near kinswomen of the peers of the realm.

Meanwhile—to come back to the castle courtyard, and to the events of that particular evening—the bells had ceased ringing. The ringers were taking some slight refreshment, in order to be quite ready for the grand peal which was to welcome the travellers as soon as their carriage should reach the summit of the hill from which Orwell Magna was visible. Mrs. Sweetapple, with many apologies, stole away to give one last look at my lady's apartments, and Mr. Rumsey once more glanced critically round the dining-room, and exchanged a few anxious words with Mr. Portsoke, the butler, and the head gardener added another spray of stephanotis to the choice bouquet which he was humbly to present to the Countess as she alighted at the portico. Another quarter of an hour and the bells burst out again, and very soon it was whispered that the carriage was in sight. The thunder of a small piece of ordnance told that the bridal pair had entered the village, and had passed under the triumphal arch, and it was not long before the cry of "Here they come!" resounded on every side.

Slowly the carriage advanced, drawn by its four milk-white steeds, and as it passed the lodge gates the excitement of the bystanders reached its climax, for seated by their Earl was the loveliest lady they had ever seen out of a picture-frame or a Book of Beauty! Loud and hearty were the acclamations, and many the blessings showered on the heads of the noble couple as they passed onward to the castle, and truly they presented, as Mr. Portsoke averred, "a most satisfactory and distinguished appearance!" Never did noble lord lead to his ancestral halls a fairer, sweeter bride than Clarissa, Countess of Orwell.

And there was a patrician grace in her remarkable beauty which Mrs. Sweetapple and her friends were not slow to perceive and appreciate. She was slender and rather tall, dark-haired and dark-eyed, pure complexioned, and perfect as to features and contour. But the chief charm lay in the sweet radiant smile, which lightened all her face as it

stole over a rosebud mouth and delicately-moulded chin and shone out in the deep, soft, tender eyes that her bridegroom had likened to gazelle's eyes, when first he beheld her in her maiden loveliness at Ripley Court.

The Earl himself, without being an Apollo or an Adonis, was a fine specimen of a high-born English gentleman. He was fair and ruddy, broad-shouldered, well-proportioned, with curly chestnut locks and laughing blue eyes, and an expression that everybody declared to be frank and good-natured; and which a few—only a few, though—described as indicative also of moral weakness and instability of character. And truly, even as a boy, Arthur, Viscount Fordham, had been famous for his love of change, for his capricious likes and dislikes, and for his sudden ardent friendships, and their equally abrupt termination. "Fever-heat one week, and down to zero the next!" was the verdict recorded upon his general conduct by one of the wisest of public schoolmasters, as regarded his noble pupil's attachments, pursuits, and sentiments; and the only hesitation which Sir Charles Ridley felt in giving his sanction to Orwell's courtship of an orphan girl under his protection was on this head. He knew the proverbial fickleness of his friend's disposition, and he feared lest his ardent passion for the lovely Clarissa should be quenched as quickly as it had sprung into existence, and he actually said to the Earl, "Think well what you are going to do, I entreat you, before you speak to Miss Grey. Though a sweeter, better girl does not live, remember she is not, socially speaking, *your equal*! And if—if you tire of her, Orwell, it will be ill for her and ill for you. My wife tells me, and my own knowledge of the girl confirms it, that she is of a wonderfully deep and tender nature, and will, if she returns your affection, give you her whole true woman's heart, completely and for ever. Now that sort of woman suffers terribly, and not unfrequently dies, under cold indifference and neglect."

To which admonition Lord Orwell replied that he had never, till he met Clarissa Grey, known what it was to love any woman; that he loved her with his whole soul, with every fibre of his nature, and that his life without her would not be worth ending. Indifference! neglect!

there was not much fear of *that*! In short, he raved like a mad lover, and very much in the fashion of the poet who so continually reiterated, "No man e'er loved like me." In conclusion, he exclaimed, with emphasis, "If Clarissa rejects me, there is no more happiness for me in this world. I shall go abroad and not return for years, if ever."

But Clarissa did not reject him, although she received his overtures with almost painful hesitation. She loved him at once, poor girl, from the first hour of his proposals, and, indeed, before, for he had made his intentions very plainly manifest ere he spoke; he became her hero, her ideal, her king and lord! But she knew perfectly well that her birth and position were not such as to entitle her to match with noble Earls. She knew, no one better, that her marriage with her patrician lover would be styled as a *mésalliance*, and that in the proud world of rank and fashion in which Lord Orwell moved, as "one to the manner born," her claims as Clarissa Grey would always be ignored, perhaps contemptuously spurned. And what if the day should ever arrive when he would regret the step—the all-important and irrevocable step—which he now so ardently desired to take? What if, by yielding now to his entreaties, she should mar his future, cloud his fortunes, darken his career? For she truly loved him, and all true love is unselfish and ever self-sacrificing. And she said to Lady Ridley, "I can trust you, my kind mistress and friend; and if you tell me that it is my duty to refuse Lord Orwell, if you think I may in any measure mar his life or injure his prospects by my humble origin and plebeian descent, I will, whatever it may cost me, resolutely decline the honour which he solicits me to accept."

But Lady Ridley—she had not half the good sound sense and judgment of her beautiful young governess—chid her for her morbid doubts, and assured her that she might, by her determined rejection, drive her noble suitor to despair.

Once married—once betrothed, indeed!—Clarissa forgot her scruples, and gave herself up to the intense felicity of loving and being loved. Orwell was devoted to his lovely bride; he lived but for her; he studied and even forestalled her tastes and wishes; he never left her side save

when compelled to do so. His pride in her was wonderful, and he accounted himself as the happiest and most favoured of mankind. For six months after his marriage he played the ardent lover, and seemed entirely absorbed in the sweet companionship of his young wife, who, on her part, lived in a delicious dream of ceaseless happiness. Her life had suddenly turned into a fairy tale, and she could hardly bring herself to believe that there had ever been a time when she suffered from loneliness and common care. For six months, without one break or cloud, she led this charmed existence; and then Orwell began gradually to take an interest in old pursuits, and to desire the society of former friends and comrades. That was well, she told herself; there was much demanded of him beyond the narrow circle of his own hearth. Inexperienced as she was in the great world's ways, she knew perfectly that the Earl of Orwell must fulfil those duties which his high rank demanded of him. Society had its claims, which could not and ought not to be ignored. Like the gentle, true-hearted Enid, she could not bear that people should

“Babble of him

As of a prince whose manhood was all gone,
And molten down in mere uxoriousness.”

And so, when the late autumn came, and he rode bravely in the hunt, and grew enthusiastic in the sport, and spent day after day with friends whose chief talk was of horses, dogs, birds, and foxes, she did not complain, even to herself. “Our honeymoon is over at last,” she said, when she began to feel lonely and depressed—for she was far from well, and there was beginning to be talk of the son and heir that was to be born in the ensuing spring. That Clarissa should present her lord with a daughter was deemed most improbable, and of course she herself ardently desired that her infant should prove a boy.

But it was a dreary winter, nevertheless, in spite of all her endeavours to be cheerful and contented; and something seemed to say to her—“Those blissful days are gone for ever.” And yet—and yet, it must be that he loved her quite as dearly as before; only the demonstrations of his affection were changed, and contrasted with

the old ardent devotion appeared—of course it was only *but appearance*—cold, colourless, and shallow. She bore up bravely, and met him always with her own sweet, bright smile; and if in secret she shed some bitter tears, they left no traces on her pale, lovely face; and one showery April morning the bells were ringing again, but not for the promised heir. Clarissa, Countess of Orwell, had given birth—prematurely—to a daughter!

CHAPTER II.

MOTHERLESS.

“ Her lot is on you—silent tears to weep,
And patient smiles to wear through suffering’s hour,
And sunless riches, from affection’s deep,
To pour on broken reeds—a wasted shower!
And to make idols, and to find them clay,
And to bewail that worship—therefore pray!”

THE Countess’s baby was a poor, puny little creature, and it was as much as the pompous London doctor, and the fine London nurse, and all their coadjutors and satellites combined, could compass to keep life in the fragile, new existence that seemed perpetually on the eve of departure; while Clarissa herself lingered long on those mysterious confines of life and death—the border-lands of both. It was under April’s tearful skies, and while the gay daffodils were blooming, that the little Lady Clarissa was born; but the summer roses were over, and the dahlia and hollyhock were in full flower, when her mother once more feebly trod the velvet greensward of Orwell Park. Never again was Lady Orwell the bright, radiant creature she had been as Clarissa Grey, and in the first months of her married life. It was generally supposed that she could not recover from the severe illness which followed upon

the birth of her infant, and without doubt her constitution, not very robust, then received a shock from which she never actually rallied.

But that was not all; her life had lost its mainspring. Lord Orwell was bitterly disappointed at the advent of "only a girl," and he showed his chagrin without even the decent reserve which his wife's critical circumstances necessitated. True it is that he displayed considerable anxiety while Clarissa's fate hung in the balance; but he could not be prevailed upon to admire, or to bestow the least notice on, the small, shrunken specimen of humanity, which was duly robed in costly lace and fine linen, and rocked in a rose-lined cradle to the tune of the orthodox patrician lullaby—

"Oh, hush thee, my baby; thy sire is a knight,
Thy mother's a lady, so lovely and bright."

He had so counted upon the hoped-for heir that he could scarcely believe he heard aright when it was announced to him that he was the father of a daughter. "And such a daughter!" he exclaimed, after his introduction to the little stranger; "such a mite of a child, with a wizened face, and shrunken limbs, and a little piping voice, and every appearance of incipient deformity! If Clarissa must give him a girl, why did she not transmit to her child her own beauty of face and elegance of form? This was a baby who would be reared with difficulty, who would prove a sickly child and an invalid young woman. A daughter of whom no father could be proud, who seemed to have been born into the world only to give trouble and cause annoyance, and require an extra expenditure!" Lord Orwell felt positively furious when he saw the poor unwelcome infant surrounded by all the preparations which had been made for the expected viscount, and he spoke so bitterly that Mrs. Sweetapple, notwithstanding her reverence for her master, was constrained to say, "Nay, my lord, it is as God pleases. Depend upon it, your little daughter will grow up to be a blessing and an honour to her noble house, and to the generation in which she lives."

"She *won't* live," replied the Earl; "upon my word she hardly looks human. Why, her fingers are like birds'

claws, and she has no features, and *what a complexion!* And the Oakleighs have always been famed for their complexions."

"And with justice, my lord. But new-born babies are never much better in that respect than this one. And I've known the very dingiest, worst favoured infants grow up with lovely clear skins, and turn out regular beauties. You'll see how she'll improve, my lord; in two or three months she will begin to be pretty, and in a year's time, I make no doubt, she will be quite a fine, thriving little lady—that is if she lives, and I don't see why she should not. I have had plenty of experience, and it is my opinion that this child, though so small and frail looking, and what Mrs. Nurse calls 'a shabby baby,' has a very tolerable constitution."

But this did not comfort Lord Orwell. He did not care a jot about the child, whom he merely regarded as an interloper, and a future incumbrance. Nor did he affect any paternal solicitude when, two days afterwards, the doctor sought him, as he was reading his morning paper, and, with a good deal of circumlocution, informed him that he thought it might be necessary to administer the rite of private baptism to the little girl, whose vitality was manifestly decreasing.

"By all means," said the Earl, briskly. "Send for Dr. Goodman, or the curate, whenever you choose. You think the child is dying?"

"I would not say that, my lord; but it is a very feeble little life—a mere flickering spark, that *may* be fanned into a flame, but which is more likely to die out suddenly. It would be only prudent—it is, in fact, a duty, if I may be permitted to say so—not to postpone the ordinance of the Church. The child may do well after all, but it is quite as well to be on the safe side."

"Of course, of course! And if the poor little thing is likely to be sickly you know one can scarcely wish her to survive."

And so the rector was summoned, and then the question naturally arose as to the name which should be given to the child. The Earl was appealed to, but he replied that any name would do; he had no particular fancy for any

feminine appellation just then. They might please themselves! And as the Countess was quite too ill to be disturbed, Mrs. Sweetapple and Mr. Rumsey proposed that their little lady should be christened after her mother, and accordingly she received simply the name of Clarissa, and at once became the Lady Clarissa Oakleigh.

For several weeks her small ladyship seemed on the point of departure from this life's troubled scene, but no one was unduly afflicted on this account, as her mother, who still continued in extremity of danger, engrossed the attention of all about her. The Earl was in despair, for, as his jewel appeared likely to vanish out of his keeping, it became more precious than ever, and he wearied the doctors in attendance with queries that were unanswerable, and drove the nurses to desperation by interfering with their functions and usurping their prerogatives. All were agreed that "my lord was a most devoted husband," and even those who complained that he slighted his puny, wailing little daughter, sympathised with his disappointment at the non-arrival of the son and heir.

At length, however, the Countess began to show signs of amendment. The famous physician who came posting down from London cautiously admitted that he "had hopes," and the family doctor, who had attended Clarissa from the first hour of her illness, confirmed the happy news, and quickly afterwards issued the gratifying bulletin, "Out of danger!" From that moment up to a certain point her ladyship continued to improve, though very slowly, and at last she was able to leave her room, and was permitted to enjoy the society of her infant. Naturally the Countess had wished for a son; but now that the little girl had arrived she would not have exchanged her for the finest boy that ever squalled. Her very weakness commended her to her mother's heart, that tender heart which was throbbing with the new sweet passion of maternal love. When once Clarissa had learned to say "*my baby!*" when once she had felt the little form nestling in her arms, when once she had tried to soothe its weary, restless pining—there had not been, alas! any chance of nursing it herself—she was never satisfied unless it was near her or at her side. And—strange as it may appear to those who

have never known a mother's fond infatuation—she was actually proud of the tiny weakling she loved to call her very own. Nurse Barlow smiled to herself when her lady claimed her admiration for the darling baby; but she was too wise, too kind, perhaps, to say what she thought about the little bundle of muslin and lace, that seemed nothing but clothes, and scarcely a living child at all.

"I declare, nurse, she smiles at me," said Clarissa one day, when, at her request, her infant, newly dressed, was laid upon her lap. "What pretty features she has! I am so glad she is not one of those large gross children one sees sometimes; she is quite a little fairy!"

"Yes, my lady," replied nurse, dryly; "she is small enough, certainly."

"But not so *very* small, for a girl? Besides, she grows; I am sure of it." And Clarissa fondly kissed the tiny wrist, and the diminutive hand, where the dimples ought by good rights to have been, but where, alas! there was nothing but flabby skin and bone. Clarissa the younger was undoubtedly the very shabbiest specimen of aristocratic babyhood that Nurse Barlow had ever tended, but the poor Countess evidently considered her a beauty! Nurse could only keep silence, and recall the old story of the maternal goose, who appraised her own goslings as fairer than the nestlings of the swan. The Countess did not half like Mrs. Barlow's limited commendation and grave reserve, and she at once took alarm. "She is healthy, is she not, nurse?" she inquired hastily; then, seeing the hesitation visible in the woman's face, she added, half imploringly, "Oh, don't tell me she is not! I know she is not *strong*; but then the most robust infants do not always turn out the most thriving. The doctor said so most distinctly."

"Surely, surely, my lady," returned nurse, but still, as it seemed to her mistress, with a certain reservation; "he must know, of course. And I've known, too, extra fine children that throve from birth, go off in fits when teething time came. But I do wish her little ladyship would not keep up that queer, chirping bit of a cry; it's more like an unfledged bird than a human infant. I would give something to hear her give a good downright squall."

"But you *do* think she will thrive?"

"Oh, yes, my lady, please God!—at least, I hope so; but I sha'n't be satisfied myself till she gains flesh, and cries less and louder."

Clarissa herself, however, was tolerably content, till one day, when the baby was ten weeks old, she tried to enlist the admiring sympathy of its father, and he coolly remarked that he could not fancy what she saw in such an ugly brat to make a fuss about it. Shocked and pained, the young mother could scarcely answer her imprudent lord.

"Ugly? Oh, Orwell!" she gasped, the tears filling her sweet, brown eyes, for she was still sadly feeble. "Why, our darling will be just like *you*."

The Earl burst into a hearty laugh. "Now, really, Clara, that is too unkind! I had no idea I was such a bad-looking fellow! My dear wife, I really entertain serious doubts whether the creature is any child of ours. She is a changeling imposed upon us by some malignant fairy, who has spirited off our own little princess to elfin land."

"Ah, you joke! You cannot mean what you say, my dear lord?"

"But I do, indeed! Look you, Clara, I don't care for babies in general, and would always prefer their room to their company—noisy, exacting, tiresome little wretches. But for this baby in particular, I feel something like aversion, or shall feel it if I am pestered with her. I shall tolerate her, perhaps, if she is kept out of my sight, by the time her brother comes to town. In the first place, I am bitterly disappointed in her sex; in the next place, I am vexed with her for being such a miserable, skinny object, inheriting neither my manly proportions, nor your marvellous beauty, my love. I cannot imagine who she takes after—who she '*favours*,' as the gossips say! There, don't cry, my dear, and I won't abuse her any more; only do not expect me to share your sentiments."

But the heir so ardently desired did not come to gladden the hearts of his parents, and to set the joy-bells ringing. The good folks of Orwell Magna often talked about the mythical young gentleman who remained a myth and

nothing more; the Countess never bore another child. She recovered, as I told you, up to a certain point, and beyond that there was little or no real progress. All through the winter which followed upon Lady Clarissa's birth, she was confined to the house, and very much to her own apartments, and the return of genial weather did not, as was expected, restore to her the health and vigour of former times. Nevertheless, she exerted herself to go up to town for a few weeks during the season, and she issued her cards, and gave receptions, and went out like any other fashionable lady; but she came back to Orwell Castle feebler and frailer than ever, and from the time of her return till the day of her death never travelled many miles from home. Of course, London was never revisited; neither was it found expedient to assemble many guests at Orwell.

The Earl was bitterly disappointed as months passed on, and his wife continued a decided invalid, now better and now worse, but always more or less indisposed, and unable to take her place in the gay circles where her lord had expected her to become the cynosure of all admiring eyes. He was often absent for weeks together; sometimes he was in Paris, sometimes at his own town-house, sometimes shooting in Scotland, and sometimes fishing in Ireland. And the Countess, though she longed for the free, happy intercourse of past days, could scarcely wish that he should be debarred any of those pleasures which seemed the privilege of his rank and age. Constantly languid and suffering, she knew that she was not a very lively companion for one who exulted in all the vigour of perfect health and in the robust energy of mature manhood. Yet how she watched for his visits, how she listened for his footsteps in the corridor, how her pulses throbbed as she saw him enter, no one ever knew; though he could not but perceive the excessive happiness that filled her heart, and brightened her faded face, when he was at her side.

Yes, she was faded, certainly; the bloom of youth and health was gone; there were lines of pain about the delicate mouth, hollows in the temples, and dark circles round the deep, lustrous eyes; and yet there were those

who thought her lovelier than ever. What was lost in contour and in colouring was gained in expression. She was still beautiful, but it was beauty of another type from that which had first charmed her husband. It was a strange, sad, spiritual beauty which now rested on the worn, though still exquisite, features. There was a pathetic regard in the soft, dark eyes, that seemed always looking into the far away, and the smiles that sometimes curved the almost colourless lips were more of heaven than of earth. On her weary couch of pain—not all physical pain, alas!—in her frequent sleepless, solitary hours, Clarissa had learned many a lesson, undreamed of in the bright days of health and full content. A new life had come to her, a new soul had been born within her; gradually she began to live in the unseen, to rejoice in the hope of the Christian, and to rest content in the love of One who never fails or forsakes the feeblest of His children. And day by day, and year by year, as decay became more rapid and visible, and the hand of death began to press heavily on heart and brow, so was the inner woman renewed, and her soul filled with an exceeding peace that nothing could destroy.

The child still lived, and in a manner thrived; but she continued small, stunted, and singularly plain—not unlike the kind of creature which “a changeling” is commonly supposed to be. Her features were irregular, her mouth large, her forehead too prominent, her neck and arms painfully skinny, and her complexion dull and sallow. The small, sharp face under the heavy brows had a curious, uncanny expression; it was the face of an adult, surmounting the ungainly figure of a dwarfish child. The little Clarissa’s proportions at five years old were those of a child of two or three; her face, especially when she was silent and thoughtful—her ordinary mood—might have been that of a woman of middle age.

“I declare,” said Nurse Barlow one day to Mrs. Sweetapple, after she had had what she called a “tussle” with her refractory charge, who stubbornly refused to be dressed—“I do declare, my Lady Clarissa looks years older than her ma! And such a temper! I never did see a child of her age half so obstinate—no! that I never did!”

And "obstinate" she truly was. When once she had made up her curious little mind, there was no unmaking it. No one, except her mother, had the smallest control or influence over her. Her mother's word was law, for Clarissa loved her child too well and too unselfishly not to exercise that authority which God Himself has committed to parents. And the child herself loved supremely, and in her own way revered, the one person whom she unhesitatingly obeyed. As for her father, she seldom saw him, and always when he and she did meet, manifested a strong aversion to his presence. It was chiefly his own fault, for he, utterly and even unnaturally indifferent to his daughter, treated her in a manner which she painfully resented. She knew well enough that he cared nothing about her, and she even took a certain pleasure in making sundry uncouth noises and grimaces which she had discovered annoyed him greatly. It was a great pain to Clarissa that such a state of feeling should exist between the two who were so dear to herself; and she often sighed, thinking of the days to come, when her perverse and unlovable little daughter should be left without the shelter of a mother's love.

Lady Clarissa was nearly six years old when it became apparent to all that the Countess's life on earth was swiftly drawing to a close. The Earl was at Baden, with certain friends of his, whom it had been better for him never to have met; and when Mrs. Goodman, the rector's wife, wrote to him on the subject of his lady's declining health, and more than hinted that his speedy return was desirable, he was too entirely absorbed in his own pursuits to feel much alarm, or even to recognise as a fact the approaching end of Clarissa's long, weary malady. He had special reasons for wishing to remain where he was a few weeks longer. Clarissa was always weaker in the spring, he told himself, and doubtless the symptoms on which Mrs. Goodman dwelt were simply those which invariably recurred at this season of the year. Still, he would go home earlier than he had intended—not just at present, but a little later on, when his wife would be better able to enjoy his society. For to do Lord Orwell justice, he did not for one moment imagine her to be

dying. She had been an invalid now so long, that he had grown accustomed to the situation; and she had for so many years alternately sunk and rallied, that he quite forgot the possibility of a sinking which should be final. He wrote, however, to Clarissa, offering to return immediately, if she really wished him to do so; but at the same time showing very plainly how reluctant he was to leave the scene of his enjoyment. His letter was kind, but not affectionate; he had never, indeed, said a harsh word to his wife during the whole of their married life. But it is quite possible to break a woman's heart without any positive unkindness. A man may be kind, in the common acceptation of the term, and yet show no sign of that affection which alone can satisfy the heart that has once known all the tenderness and sweetness of love itself—or of what passed current for love, rather; for a true, pure love is deathless,—“love is love for evermore.”

Early in May, the Countess became apparently stronger, and her attendants hoped that once more the crisis was past, and partial convalescence commencing. My lord was expected in the first days of June. But ere the flowery May month closed, Clarissa was gone—

“Past night, past day,
Over the hills, and far away.”

She sank very suddenly at last. In the morning she was sitting up as usual in her boudoir, helping the little Clarissa to arrange a lapful of hawthorn sprays and guelder roses, which she had brought in with her from the shrubberies; in the evening, she lay quietly on her couch, with “the light that never was on sea or land” in her dying eyes.

“Oh, if my lord would but come!” said Nurse Barlow, as she watched beside that lonely deathbed; and her mistress answered, “When he does come, nurse, give him my last dearest, fondest love, and the letter which you will find in my desk addressed to him. And tell him he must not grieve too much that he comes too late. I thought myself that I might last till Midsummer—I did, indeed, or I should have entreated him to hasten his return.”

“Perhaps you will rally again, my lady,” said nurse,

consolingly. "I have known you as bad as this before."

"No," she replied, "this is the end, and I thank my God that it comes so calmly, so peacefully. It is not hard to die, nurse; do not be afraid for me. He in whom I have trusted is with me still. He has trodden the way, once so dark, but now lighted by His love, and cheered by His presence; for, I tell you, *He is with me now!* And, nurse, I shall see Him face to face, and be with Him for ever."

"Shall I fetch Lady Clarissa?" asked nurse, an hour or two later, when the shadow of death rested unmistakably on the quiet, ash-pale features.

"No," was the mother's answer. "Let my darling remember me as she saw me this morning, before I was worse. Be patient with her, nurse; for my sake, love the child and bear with her. God has been so good; He has told me that my prayers for her are heard, and will be answered. My Clarissa will one day be an earnest, noble-hearted Christian woman, a blessing to all about her. Through much sorrow and suffering, my child will enter into God's kingdom; it seems to me that years of trial are before her, but at the last her Master will say to her, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!'"

A little longer, and all was over; the mysterious threshold was passed, the new life begun. That which had been the Countess of Orwell lay cold and still in death, but that which had loved and suffered so patiently had passed within the veil. The slow-tolling muffled bell sounded sadly on the sweet May morning. All the village knew that "my lady" was gone, and that the little Lady Clarissa was motherless.

CHAPTER III.

THE EARL'S ALTERNATIVE.

"I will marry her, sir, at your request; but if there be no great love in the beginning, yet Heaven may decrease it upon better acquaintance, when we are married, and have more occasion to know one another."—*Merry Wives of Windsor*.

"WELL, my lord, I wouldn't make complaints if I could help it, but it has been borne in upon my mind this long time that I am failing in my duty by not speaking. I did hope as she grew older and came to have more sense that she would improve, but things grow from worse to worse, and there's no saying what they may come to. It does not do for children, even very good children, to have their own way entirely."

"Have their own way, Mrs. Sweetapple? Certainly not! 'Spare the rod and spoil the child,' you know! But why do you allow Lady Clarissa to have her own way?"

"My lord, if you were more at home, if you saw more of her little ladyship, you would never ask that question. Lady Clarissa *will* have her own way! It is of no mortal use saying 'you must,' or 'you must not,' to her. What she will do she will do, and what she won't she won't, and that's just the plain English of it."

"But that is sheer nonsense, Sweetapple! Dear me, you are four times bigger and stronger than she is, and seven or eight times older; and if the child will not do your bidding, you should simply *make* her obey you. What persuasion won't do, compulsion may; if kind words are of no avail, use angry ones."

"My lord, you may use compulsion without being able to compel. And as for angry words, my young lady cares no more for them than for gentle ones. You can neither coax her nor frighten her into being good. And then,—the questions she asks!"

"What sort of questions?"

"All sorts, my lord. Dreadful questions for a child, and dreadful thoughts she must have, too. I will give you a specimen of her strange talk. A little while ago, I tried to teach her some of *Watts's First Catechism*, and we did get through the first questions and answers, which, no doubt, your lordship remembers?"

"Indeed, I do not. I suppose I learned my catechisms when I was a little chap, but I have forgotten them, every word. I remember the Church Catechism begins by asking you what your name is, and there's something about your godfathers and godmothers, and the devil and all his works, isn't there?"

"Certainly there is, my lord; but it was not the *Church Catechism* which I endeavoured to impart to Lady Clarissa. It was *Watts's Catechism*, the 'First Catechism,' which is meant for quite young children. And it begins with 'Can you tell me, child, who made you?' The answer is, 'The great God who made heaven and earth.' Well, my young lady straightway caught at that, for she has a wonderful memory, and says she to me, 'Now, Sweetie,'—that's the name she gave me as soon as ever she could speak—'who is God, after all? People talk a lot about Him; but where does He live, and who ever saw Him? And how do I know the book tells true?'"

"A born sceptic, I declare! And what did you answer?"

"I replied gravely, 'My lady, good books always tell true, and it does not become little girls to doubt their elders!' And then I explained that God was a Spirit, and no one could see Him, though He could see us. And I told her how He marked all her naughty words and ways, and put them down in His book, and how when she died all her sins would be found written against her. And then she laughs and says, 'And what will be done to me?' I replied that she would go to hell, and live there for ever and for ever in everlasting fire and torment."

"Rather strong doctrine that, for a girl just turned seven, is it not, Sweetapple? Do you call that milk for babes? What did she say?"

"She said plain out, 'I don't believe it, Sweetie; I

could not be burnt for ever and ever ; *I should burn out !* I dare say there is no hell, after all.' My lord, it made my very flesh creep to hear such a child talk like a wicked infidel. Of course, I punished her, but it was of no use. I locked her up in the linen-room, where she could not well get into mischief, and she got out through the window ; I am sure I wonder she did not break her neck ! She had to scramble down a clear fifteen feet, and nothing to hold by but the ivy and the lattice-work the clematis is trained upon. I have promised to shut her up in a dark closet next time."

"Do you know, I would not do that, Sweetapple, for it would be of no use. Besides, I don't hold with frightening children out of their senses, even if they are terribly naughty. And, after all, the child only said what she thought."

"Oh ! if children are to say all they think, my lord, I've done. In my young days we were never allowed to answer our elders, or to call in question what they taught us. And to go *reasoning* in that way ! And I am pretty sure that at this moment Lady Clarissa no more believes in hell than I believe in Mahomet's Paradise. It's a shocking thing for a young lady of rank."

"If that is all, you need not trouble yourself, Sweetapple. Leave hell alone, and tell the child that if she is good she will go to the other place. Preaching hell fire and God's wrath would never make a Christian of me ; talk to her about heaven, and see how that answers."

"My lord, she believes nothing of that sort. I read to her on Sunday afternoons from the 'Bible ; and the last wet Sunday that ever was, I read to her all about the Flood and the Ark, and she listened very attentively, and as usual asked heaps of questions. When I had finished, I said, 'Now, is not that a very pretty story, Lady Clarissa ?' And what do you think was her reply ?"

"Something quite heterodox, I am sure, from your face, Sweetapple."

"I am not sure, my lord, what *heterodox* means ; but what my lady did say was, 'No, it is not pretty, but it is very funny. And it *can't* be true—it never could rain so much. I don't believe it.' And I might as well have

talked to a post as have gone on talking to her. I should not have convinced her if I had argued with her for a year."

"I believe you. I am afraid I am a bit of a sceptic myself, Sweetapple; and I suppose my daughter takes after me. It is a pity, in consideration of her sex, that she does not take after her mother, who was a saint if ever woman was. There is always something repulsive in an irreligious woman; women had better be superstitious than sceptical. It does not matter what a man is."

"Except to himself, my lord. A man must give an account of himself to God, just as surely as a woman. But I have not told you all. One day I had occasion to say to Lady Clarissa that she was nothing but dust and ashes. It was just after she learned that bit of the Catechism, and she turned upon me with, 'Did the great God make me of dust and ashes, then—are you sure?' Of course I said I was. She only replied, 'I don't believe it; if He did make me He had something else.' And she looked at her hands and arms and laughed, till I felt a creeping all down my back. Next day she got a lot of dust and a heap of ashes, and seemed to be playing with them. Nurse went to stop her, asking her how she could touch such dirty things, and she said she was trying to find out whether she was made of dust and ashes, as I had told her, and she was sure now that I was wrong, for dust and ashes would not stick together without they were wet with water, and made into a paste. Nurse laughed, but I felt more inclined to cry, for what can be done with such a child, my lord?"

"I am sure I don't know, Sweetapple. She is an '*enfant terrible*,' and no mistake, and she will give all her teachers a lot of trouble. I am sure I do not envy her tutors and governesses. But you were to blame. Of course she could not understand, nor could you explain, that she *inherited* flesh and blood, which is popularly supposed to be dust and ashes. And of course her only idea of ashes is *cinders*. To tell her that she was actually compounded of dust and ashes was to tell her what was untrue. You should not say things to set her thinking."

"Indeed, my lord," returned Mrs. Sweetapple, deeply offended, "I shall be only too thankful to wash my hands

of Lady Clarissa. And that is what I mainly intended to say to your lordship. I can't be responsible for her any longer. You are away for months together, and the older she grows the more refractory and the *odder* she gets. I have tried to teach her to sew. Bless you! I might as well have tried to teach a wild cat to set her stitches! She wouldn't even thread her needle, and she threw her silver thimble out of window. Lady Clarissa must be placed under proper discipline, my lord."

"What do you mean by proper discipline, Mrs. Sweetapple?"

"The discipline of school life, my lord, or else of a strict governess, that has had experience. Besides, it is quite time she learned something."

"I suppose it is. She can read, of course?"

"Not a word, my lord. She barely knows her letters, and she won't look at a book. Nurse bought her a pretty picture-book last time she went to Winsham, hoping to get her so interested that she would want to read the stories. Instead of that, she just made up the tales to suit the pictures out of her own head, and would not hear of looking at the printed pages. Was there ever such a child?"

"I don't know, Sweetapple, for I never had much to do with children; but I suppose she ought to learn to read. A girl cannot do without some sort of education, though she need not learn much. She ought to read and write and speak her own language correctly, and she should be able to patter French pretty fluently, and she should be taught to dance gracefully, and to play a little on the piano; and, of course, she should be trained in the habits and manners of a gentlewoman. That is quite enough. I do not like girls crammed with all kinds of knowledge and burdened with accomplishments; if women are ornamental and amiable, that is all that can be required of them. I'll see about a governess, Mrs. Sweetapple."

"Thank you, my lord, and I hope you will soon find just the person who may be suitable."

But in her heart Mrs. Sweetapple was far from sanguine. She knew too well that her lord's promises were not very often kept, and that it was quite possible he would go away and think no more about his little daughter and

her requirements. He lived now almost entirely in town or on the Continent. Since his wife's death Orwell Park had been deserted, and, as the country people complained, "not properly kept up." The fact being that the Earl was in difficulties, and sadly short of money, though he had succeeded to as fine a rent-roll and to estates as unencumbered as any in the Eastern Counties. How this unpleasant state of things came about he never could clearly understand; for, as he argued, when explaining his position to the man of business who had also had charge of his father's affairs, "I am not a spendthrift; I don't keep up a great establishment; I am not extravagant, and yet——"

"And yet all the large sums of ready money which came into your lordship's possession on the demise of the late Earl, your father, have somehow been expended, without any apparent result. Nor is that all: you have borrowed largely at a ruinous rate of interest, and at this moment you run the risk of forfeiting certain valuable securities. I tell you plainly all that is not entailed may for ever pass away from you, and that which is inalienable will be so heavily burdened that your actual income must be disagreeably limited."

"And yet I have not squandered money as some of my friends have! I have not been exactly what you would call *economical*, I know; but I never dreamed of the necessity for economy existing in my own case. Fellows have to *retrench* now and then, I am aware; and I suppose there are very few noble families that have not, at some period or other, gone through that uncomfortable process, and I don't mind retrenching a little if need be."

"*'A little'* will be of no avail. And your lordship must remember that you have been professedly '*retrenching*' for the last four years. But retrenching may mean something or nothing—or worse than nothing."

"It cannot mean '*nothing*' in my own case. For have I not let on lease my mansion in Grosvenor Square and lived in chambers and at my club? And have I not gone abroad, as *you* recommended—eh, Mr. Hadfield?"

"I did not recommend your lordship to take up your abode at Homburg, which unfortunately seems to be the only place that agrees with your health. And there is a

certain phase of club-life which proves in the end ten times more costly than the most careless and lavish housekeeping. If your lordship would only forswear the turf, and—*roulette*!—and games of hazard generally!”

“You might as well ask me to turn cold-water drinker! And as for play, why, you know it is mere amusement! I seldom go in for stakes of any magnitude, and I won a pot of money at Ascot last year.”

“And lost it, and more than lost it, at Goodwood! Lord Orwell, your method is to save sixpences and squander half-crowns. You say your stakes are, as a rule, not heavy, but I must beg to remind you that, light or heavy, they are continually being entered. A moderate incessant play is far more disastrous in its issues than a few gambling crises, which are apt to frighten foolish people into their sober senses. It would have been good for you, my lord, had you *lost* immensely.”

“I never lost immensely nor gained immensely, Mr. Hadfield. But it is of no use arguing about the way the money goes when it is gone. We must raise money again on the Hunsdon estates.”

“You cannot! That is unless you sell yourself body and soul to the Jews. The Hunsdon lands are mortgaged to the last penny of their value.”

“What about Swaffdale?”

“Still worse! Swaffdale, not being in the entail, is all but lost to you.”

“And I really *can't* thin the timber any more. I should only come to grief if I did. You know the sort of cantankerous fellow Tom Oakleigh is! If Providence had only blessed me with a son of my own, I might have come to speedy terms with these reptiles of creditors. That puny girl of mine is more plague than profit—in short, nothing but an anxiety and an incumbrance.”

“That reminds me, my lord, Lady Clarissa ought to have some income secured to her. Her mother having no property, and there being no marriage settlements, she might, in case of your premature decease, be left as portionless as a beggar. I am afraid it would be a matter of much difficulty to do anything under present circumstances; still, if you are willing, for your child's

sake, to make a sacrifice, I think a little might be secured for the Lady Clarissa's future use—say, a couple of hundreds per annum! A woman of title can scarcely do with less, I think."

"Bother Lady Clarissa! I never wanted a girl; I had set my heart on a son! and to think that she should be the only one. No, I don't feel inclined to make a sacrifice on her account; besides, I have a good part of my life still before me; I am barely forty."

"A man's fortunes are usually made or marred before he is forty. My lord, I will be frank with you. I have carefully considered your liabilities, and I have calculated that they cannot be met with your present means. If you continue in your career of impecuniosity, there is nothing but ruin and outlawry before you. I see but one alternative——"

"And that is——?"

"You must marry again, and the Countess of Orwell must be a wealthy woman."

The Earl's countenance fell. "I don't want to marry again: I have been twice married, and have no desire to make another venture. And it is not so easy to catch heiresses, out of novels. Is there no other way?"

"No other way that I can perceive. You have married for family, and you have married for love and beauty; now you must marry for money!"

"Easier said than done, Hadfield. And the pill, though gilded, would be difficult to swallow! Heiresses are always ugly, elderly, *exigeante*. No! I can't do it. Think of some other scheme."

"Your lordship can surrender your affairs to your creditors, become bankrupt in point of fact. When the estate is finally wound up, some small pittance may or not remain to you. The alternative is not a pleasant one; take my advice, and marry."

"Marry whom? Have you a heiress all ready and waiting for me? Who is she? What is she? Let me know all about it. I tell you beforehand I won't marry a chattering old maid, not if she can afford to play at shuck-penny with sovereigns, and curl her hair with bank notes."

"The lady I have in view is not an old maid. She is very rich, very handsome, and—and—I am assured, well educated."

"is she a gentlewoman?"

"I can scarcely say she is. She is a client of mine, and that is how I came to know her so well. Her late husband——"

"*Her late husband!* You are not proposing that I should marry a widow, surely?"

"Why not? It seems to me only in the fitness of things that widowers should wed with widows. And this widow is immensely wealthy, and childless—though, by the way, I believe she has a step-daughter; and she is ambitious, wants rank and position, and will be only too happy to pay your debts, redeem your mortgages, release your securities, &c., if she may only be made Countess of Orwell in return."

"I should not mind her money if I could have it without the encumbrance. A few cool thousands would set me on my legs again."

"No, not a few, my lord! A *few* thousands would only be a sop for the jaws of Cerberus. You want a good many thousands, and you may have them, if you will. Mrs. Shrosbery is in possession of a quarter of a million—I don't say how much more—and it is her whim to marry a nobleman. Why should you not be that nobleman?"

"I'll think about it. I don't mind seeing the lady; but I make no promises, mark you. I have no inclination for the match, not the least; still, one may as well wear chains of matrimony as chains of debts and duns. And you are sure the widow is handsome?"

"I am no great judge of beauty myself; but it is understood on all hands that Mrs. Shrosbery is a very fine woman. She is tall and well made, and she has a splendid head of hair."

"Her charms are full-blown, no doubt. She is not in the rose-bud style, I suppose?"

"Well, no! A full-blown rose would be the better *simile*. But she is barely thirty-five, and does not look her age; by candle-light, and judiciously dressed, she might pass for twenty-five."

"Where is she to be seen?"

"She is at this moment in my own house; she has been spending the winter at Cheltenham, and is now come up to town for the season. She is in treaty for a house in Kensington Gore. If your lordship would condescend to dine with us to-morrow evening, you might be introduced to Mrs. Shrosbery, and judge for yourself. I should give out that you had a little business which could not be properly settled to-day in office hours. Will you come?"

"Thank you, I think I will. If the widow is not to my taste, I have only to be discreet. I need not compromise myself at a first interview. But I warn you, I won't marry a fat, vulgar woman, with nobody knows how many vulgar relations, even though she may have inherited Aladdin's lamp. You are quite sure the money is all right?"

"Perfectly sure. I know her affairs far better than she knows them herself. Her fortune, derived from her late husband, Peter Shrosbery, is left to her quite unconditionally; the old man was very fond of her; he was thirty years her senior, and as kind and generous an old fellow as I ever met. He was no dog in the manger to tie her up with conditions, when he should be cold in his grave. I advised him to make some limitations as to his widow's power over the property; but he would not hear of it. 'No, no!' he answered; 'she has been a good wife to me, and I should like her to enjoy herself when I am dead and gone. She is no romantic girl, and has plenty of common-sense. I am not afraid but that she will make a good bargain for herself when she marries again.'"

"How long has Mr. Shrosbery been dead?"

"About fifteen months; the widow is still in her second mourning; she is only just thinking of returning to society."

"Was she 'in society,' then, in her husband's lifetime?"

"Not in what you would consider as '*society*,' my lord. 'Society' is a relative term, I take it. There is society at Seven Dials, and there is society in May Fair. Mrs. Shrosbery's society was somewhere between the two. Nothing less than May Fair, however, will in future con-

tent her. My lord, my previsions are that you will marry Louisa Shrosbery."

"And so her name is Louisa!—a name I detest."

"Mr. Shrosbery generally called her 'Loo,' and being christened Peter himself, he had a little joke of his own about '*Peterloo*!' If you like the lady, you will soon be reconciled to her name."

"I must first be reconciled to the idea of marrying her. Do widows expect much love-making?"

"I really cannot say, my lord, never having had any experience in that way. But women, whether maids or widows, like to be courted. However, you need not concern yourself on that point at present. I will not say another word till you have been introduced to Mrs. Shrosbery."

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. SHROSBERY.

"Methinks the lady talks exceeding wise!
Has she a heart, think you?"

"We shall have a small dinner-party to-night," said Mr. Hadfield, at the breakfast-table, next morning. "And, Mrs. Shrosbery, I shall expect you to be indescribably charming."

"Am I ever anything but charming?" asked the lady, with a languishing glance at the celebrated lawyer.

"Certainly not!" was the gallant reply of the old beau, who had been making fine speeches to fine ladies ever since he left off petticoats. "Of course, you are invariably charming; but I want you to outshine yourself this evening. Pray make your appearance in the drawing-room armed for conquest."

"Will there be anybody worth the trouble of conquer-

ing? I can tell you I am not accustomed to put on my war-paint for every-day people. Who is coming?"

"Mrs. Hadfield will tell you all about it; I am due in Westminster Hall in half an hour, and I hear the brougham coming round. Good morning, Mrs. Shrosbery; I shall expect to find you radiant when I return with my most honoured guest. A word to the wise is sufficient! Good morning, mother."

Mrs. Hadfield, who was really the lawyer's wife, though, like many other elderly husbands, he called her "*mother*," was a dear, gentle-voiced, kind-hearted little woman, verging upon sixty-five. She was still pretty, with a faint tint of peach-blossom on her cheeks, and soft lustre in her light blue eyes, and braids of beautiful silver-white hair, that exactly suited her delicate but faded complexion, and her sweet, innocent expression of countenance. A greater contrast than she presented to her visitor can scarcely be imagined.

Mrs. Shrosbery was, as Mr. Hadfield had declared, tall and well-made, and would undoubtedly be considered *handsome* by most people. She had a good deal of colour, not too much, at present; fine hazel eyes, which she knew how to use; a straight nose, and that great charm of woman—an abundant supply of glossy, curling dark hair, which she could arrange in any way that pleased her. Her mouth spoiled her; it was a coarse mouth, and her forehead, too, wanted breadth, and was just a trifle too high for actual beauty. Also, there were points about her, such as large ears, over-sized hands and feet, which to a fastidious observer might be supposed to indicate a plebeian origin.

Who really was she? you may perhaps ask; and as her history and that of Lady Clarissa became speedily interwoven, it is just as well that you should know all that is to be known about her. The records of her earliest years are shrouded in obscurity. Her father and mother "*lived down Whitechapel way*," and it was commonly reported that her parents, being but in a small way of business, had her taught the trade of dressmaking, with a view, of course, to future self-maintenance. But this *on dit* one would think must have been without foundation,

since, as Mrs. Peter Shrosbery, she barely knew how to thread her needle, unless it were with *chenille* and Berlin wool, and she frequently avowed her own ignorance and stupidity in the womanly art of sewing, shaping, and cutting out. It was also rumoured—falsely, of course—that in her first bloom she was engaged to a Whitechapel butcher; but this fact, if fact it be, remains entirely unsubstantiated. The exact point at which the history of Louisa Sparks becomes really reliable is that of her marriage to Peter Shrosbery, of Bermondsey and of Peckham, a wealthy tallow-chandler and soap-boiler, old enough to be her father, a widower, with the encumbrance of an only child—a delicate little girl, who lived almost entirely with her mother's family in the country. How Miss Sparks and Mr. Shrosbery met, and felt a mutual flame, and how soon their passion was confessed, cannot be ascertained; nor does it concern us to inquire, as Miss Sparks had nothing to do with Lady Clarissa, though Mrs. Shrosbery and she were fated to become most intimately acquainted. It is enough to state that the tallow-chandler was quickly fascinated; that he made honourable proposals, and was not refused; and that in due season the banns of marriage between Peter Shrosbery, widower, and Louisa Sparks, spinster, were put up in Shoreditch Church, where the ceremony was subsequently performed.

Now, Mr. Hadfield was Mr. Shrosbery's lawyer, and it so happened that at one period or another of his prosperous career he required a good deal of law. Gradually, as Mr. Shrosbery grew richer, which he did at an amazing pace, his affairs were more and more in the hands of Mr. Hadfield, who was very often at the chandler's private residence at Peckham, where, as a matter of course, he saw a good deal of the youthful and sprightly Mrs. Shrosbery. He could not but admire the lady who made his friend and client so good a wife. He could scarcely suppose she had married for love; nevertheless, she was most exemplary in all her wifely duties. Her *ménage*, if not elegant and tasteful, was really excellent in itself; and she waited upon her husband, when he became an invalid, with a devotion not too common in those who are sup-

posed to have made a match of pure, uncalculating affection.

The time arrived when it became evident that Peter Shrosbery's days on earth were numbered; when the family doctor and the famous physician, who was called in to "give an opinion," ominously shook their heads, and cautiously hinted that if their patient had any worldly affairs requiring settlement, it would only be prudent to attend to them without delay. Also, it was intimated that it was expedient that the little girl before-mentioned should be fetched from her home among the Surrey hills, and that a clergyman should forthwith be requested to take in hand the spiritual interests of the fast-failing tallow-chandler.

So prudent a man as Peter Shrosbery had not, of course, kept his worldly affairs in such confusion as to require any great amount of settlement; still, there were several matters needing adjustment, and Mr. Hadfield's legal and friendly services were continually in demand.

"It's all straight, I think," said the dying man to the lawyer not many days before the end came. "I have taken pains to leave everything quite square and clear, so that there shall be no questions or quibbling when I am gone. As you drew up my will, you know all about it. My daughter Susan has her mother's property, and she has tidy expectations from her relations at Reigate, and I leave her twenty thousand pounds besides—quite enough for a girl who will never make any great figure in the world. All the rest, to the last farthing, I leave, *without conditions*, to my wife Louisa, and you and she are sole executors."

"But," urged Mr. Hadfield, "Mrs. Shrosbery is a very fine young woman, and—excuse me, my dear friend—but it is not impossible that in years to come, when time has naturally softened the anguish of bereavement, she may take to herself another husband."

"Of course she will marry again," replied his client. "Why should she not? Why should she, in the flower of her days, be condemned to perpetual widowhood? Of course she thinks now, poor girl, that she can never get over my loss; but time heals deeper wounds than here"

can be, and she will naturally recover her spirits, and be once more admired and courted—and why not? I am no dog in the manger, and I am not going to tie her up anyhow. Poor Loo! she has been a good wife to me, and we have been very happy; but I know I was too old and grave for her. I want her to enjoy her life. You will look after her, I know?”

“I will do what I can. You are a very generous man, Mr. Shrosbery.”

“No, no!—only just. I don’t like binding women down, and making conditions, and that sort of thing. I have made my money myself, and I have a right to do what I like with it—little Susie being provided for. And it shall all go to my dear wife, Louisa Shrosbery, and she may do precisely what she likes with it.”

“Still, you would not like your money to be turned into ducks and drakes! To be squandered by any worthless prodigal, who may spend Mrs. Shrosbery’s handsome income, and dissipate the principal, and ill-use *her*!”

“I should turn in my grave, if any brute ill-used her! by all that’s sacred I should!” said the sick man. “But I am not afraid—I should be afraid of most women, but I am not of Loo. She is prudent to a fault; she won’t be caught by Brummagem jewellery and gilded shows! No fear of that; she’ll make a wise choice, as you’ll see, if you live a few years longer. I don’t say she’ll wed a wealthy man, for money need not marry money, though it often does, which seems to me a pity; but she will know what she is about, or I am much deceived, and take her pigs to the best market. She thinks a lot of gentility, titles, and all that kind of thing, and maybe she will go in for rank and position in her second marriage. I don’t see why she should not, if it pleases her. Anyhow, she is safe to do well for herself.”

If Mr. Hadfield had known how *much* money was being thus bequeathed, he would perhaps have continued to urge upon his client the necessity of the conditions which he spurned; but he did not know till it came to settling the estate how very rich the widow Shrosbery really was. When he told Lord Orwell that she possessed *over* a quarter of a million, he spoke quite within the truth; the

fact being that the surplus thousands over and above the £250,000 went far towards making up the quarter to half a million!

And so Peter Shrosbery, who had never wronged any man, nor owed a sixpence in his life, nor spoken an unkind word to child or woman, died, and was buried with all the pompous ceremony due to so rich a person and to so excellent a citizen. He had retired from business some years previously, so that Louisa was not mixed up with the soap and candle works, to her own extreme satisfaction; and as soon as possible after the funeral she retired with an elderly companion to Bath, whence after awhile she migrated to Cheltenham, where she resided during some months quite apart from society—the most decorous of inconsolable widows!

But the first year of mourning being fully expired, she felt that it was only her *duty* to return by degrees to the world of fashion in which she secretly desired to shine. I said *return*; but *enter* would have been more correct, for up to the period of her widowhood she had not aspired to that which certain privileged people call “society.” She was heartily tired of the dulness and inanities of fashionable watering-places, and her heart yearned after the joys of the metropolis. Mr. Hadfield, who had arranged everything for her, and to whose judgment she trusted implicitly, at this juncture invited her to come up to town at once, and spend a few quiet weeks with himself and Mrs. Hadfield, while she looked out for a suitable house in the aristocratic quarter, and made her arrangements generally. Nothing loth, she accepted the invitation, and found the situation so pleasant that her visit extended over many weeks.

Mr. Hadfield, too, enjoyed the society of Mrs. Shrosbery, for a little mild and perfectly decorous flirtation was quite in his way. Exchanging compliments and graceful speeches with her gave a flavour and piquancy to his home life which had long been wanting. As Mrs. Hadfield used to say, “They get on amazingly, and she amuses my husband so well that I can go to sleep after dinner without feeling that he is slighted.” And so it came to pass that the lawyer was consulted on nearly every point, and,

of course, it one day fell out that, while the lady of the house took her *siesta*, the subject of second marriages come upon the *tapis*. And then it was that Mrs. Shrosbery avowed her ambitious projects. She quite intended making a second alliance, and nothing short of the peerage would content her. "I will be 'my lady,' or remain Mrs. Shrosbery to my dying day," was the conclusion of the whole matter. And Mr. Hadfield assured her that with her beauty, her wit, and her splendid fortune, she might command any alliance she chose short of royalty. And even that might be within her reach if she did not object to petty German princes of ruined fortunes.

But Mrs. Shrosbery *would* object, and she said so very decidedly. Poor Peter had known what he was talking about, when he gave his widow-elect credit for an unusual amount of worldly wisdom. Louisa was not going to waste her charms or her money-bags on impecunious black-legs, with mortgaged principalities and dubious reputation. She had a supreme contempt for any sort of foreign title, and was persuaded in her own mind that nearly all the Continental counts and chevaliers who figured in Bath and Cheltenham drawing-rooms were hairdressers or dancing-masters in their native land.

"No!" she replied gravely; "no German princes for me, I thank you, Mr. Hadfield! Of course I am not so foolish as to suppose that I can ever aspire to match with British royalty, but I see no reason why I should not become the lawful wife of a British *peer*. No recent creation, mind you, no 'law-lord,' whatever that may be, but I know my Peter thought very small beer of them, as only half-and-half noblemen. And I scarcely expect to get a duke—dukes are rather scarce, are they not? Nor yet a marquis perhaps. An earl is about the ticket, I suppose, and I would put up with a viscount if he could boast of long descent, sixteen quarterings, and all that, you know! But I will have nothing to say to anything *lower* than a viscount, so don't propose any barons or baronets; and, of course, City knights are no more eligible than draymen."

Mr. Hadfield was inwardly amused. He was secretly hoping that his eldest son, who was a much cleverer man

than himself, might one day aspire to becoming "a law-lord," and the idea of a woman, who had never even heard of heraldry, stipulating for "sixteen quarterings," was, to say the least of it, extremely diverting! Certainly, Mrs. Shrosbery was not at all disposed to underrate her claims; it was very clear that if she disposed of herself, and of what was of infinitely more importance, of her very handsome fortune, she meant to have an equivalent. But Mr. Hadfield was determined to be quite sure of his premises; before he stirred in the matter, he would receive definite "instructions." And his fair client being far from over-fastidious, he was not afraid of offending her by coming boldly to the point.

"Let me quite understand you, Mrs. Shrosbery," he said gravely; "you *do*, then, contemplate a second marriage?"

"Well, *yes*! I may as well say first as last that I do. I cannot say I appreciate single blessedness as some women do; if I had children I might feel differently. As it is, I see no reason why I should not marry well and enjoy my life. If I am careful, I have twenty years of health and tolerable looks before me. A woman with advantages, and with proper attention to her dress and to her appearance generally, may hold on till she is fifty-five. After that, the sooner she retires into private life the better, I should fancy, unless she is like that Madame Ninon that you were speaking of the other day, who kept her beauty till she was over seventy."

"So far, so good! Now, how soon will you marry, provided an entirely eligible *parti* presents himself?"

"Well, that is a delicate question! Some ladies think they have done all that is prudent if they wait a twelvemonth and a day. I would not marry Peter till the first Mrs. Shrosbery had been in her grave a twelvemonth and a day. If I had, I should have expected her to haunt us. But I have always said, and I think I'll stick to it, Mr. Hadfield, that I never would marry again under two years. Then, no one could say ugly things of me, and tell people that I was in a hurry, and I should feel that I had paid every respect to my poor dear Peter's memory."

"Next I must ask, will you be content with nobility, *without* wealth? Will you accept a title, without the corresponding income? Would an impoverished nobleman not disgust you?"

"That would depend! I should not care to marry a beggar. Though, I really don't know, all other things being equal, that I need mind titled beggary. For, you see, I have enough, if he have not, and Peter always used to say he never could go in for money marrying money. And there's something else to be considered: I am no young simpleton, and I am pretty sure no *rich, unencumbered* peer of the realm would marry *me*. Men of rank and ancient family marry for three things—family or connection, beauty, and money. Now, I need not mince matters with you, Mr. Hadfield, because you know pretty well that I have no connections that I choose to acknowledge. I've got some uncles, and aunts, and cousins down Whitechapel way, but even as Mrs. Shrosbery I always gave them the cold shoulder. So I cannot be married for my family. I am not 'well connected,' as you are, I believe. Then as to beauty, I am afraid I have not enough to make a man sacrifice all considerations to *that*. I am well to look at, I am aware; poor Peter always said so, and you have paid me a few compliments, you know, Mr. Hadfield, quite enough to turn a vain woman's head; but I am not like *Juliet* in the play, nor like that *Helen* that they fought about in the ancient times—though I do believe, now I come to think about it, that I am a *little* like that Queen of Egypt whose picture I went to see the other day, only my hair is not so blue-black, nor my skin so brown, and I am always properly dressed, which she was not, by any means. And then to come to money, it is all right, and the man that wants that, gets it, when he marries me."

"You are a very sensible woman, Mrs. Shrosbery,—yes, and a very handsome one, too! I will not have you under-rate your own good looks. As to Cleopatra, she was not fit to hold a candle to you—that is, in my estimation."

"I am sure it is very kind of you to say so. But do you know any impoverished nobleman at present? He must

be good-looking, you understand, and not too elderly, and he must be amiable, and *he must have a pedigree !*"

Mr. Hadfield smiled. He did know Mrs. Shrosbery's antecedents, and he had often wondered that Peter Shrosbery had had the temerity to overlook them. Louisa's papa was something in a very small way—so small that he hardly knew himself what it was. And Louisa's mamma was a very inferior greengroceress, and dispensed potatoes, and cabbages, and "garden-stuff" generally, and half-hundredweights of coals, with her own fair hands. She was none the worse for that, certainly ; honest trade, down to costermongering, is nothing to be ashamed of, and selling onions and radishes, and pickling cabbages in their season, is perfectly respectable, though not exactly genteel. Still, it was too much that the lucky daughter of Mrs. Sparks should stipulate for pedigrees and sixteen quarterings ! But Louisa attributed the lawyer's quiet smile to an appreciation of her own peculiar good taste and judgment.

And as he "smole that smile," he determined to make a match between the wealthy, ambitious widow, and his impecunious client, the Earl of Orwell. There would be no difficulty so far as the lady was concerned, for Lord Orwell more than fulfilled all the required conditions she had named ; but whether the Earl could be induced to woo the rich relict of Peter Shrosbery was quite another consideration ; so Mr. Hadfield kept his own counsel and said nothing about any contemplated introduction. He would sound his lordship first, before he gave Mrs. Shrosbery a hint. As we have seen, he did sound his noble client, and found him, though slightly averse, by no means impracticable. Indeed, the thing was as good as done in the lawyer's estimation, for the Earl was absolutely ruined. He *must* have money, and there was only one way of securing it. And then Mrs. Shrosbery would know very well how to make her game ; she had wonderful tact, and would soon find out all her lordly lover's little weaknesses. Once introduce the pair, and he was tolerably certain that ere long the widow would become Countess of Orwell.

Left alone with Mrs. Hadfield, Louisa soon learned all

that she wanted to learn concerning that evening's entertainment. The Earl of Orwell was the principal guest; he was a widower, and he was—according to Debrett and Lodge—of very ancient family, and was bound to have a lengthy pedigree, and an unlimited number of "quarterings."

"He has never been here to dinner before," said the gentle little lady, "for, of course, earls are not exactly in our way. But I suppose Anthony has some special end in view in asking him. They have had a great deal of business together lately. It is so widely known that his lordship is in difficulties, that I need not mind mentioning the fact to you. I am very sorry for him."

Mrs. Shrosbery said she was sorry, too, though her remark would scarcely have passed unchallenged in the Palace of Truth. But she perfectly comprehended why she was to arm herself for conquest. As Mr. Hadfield had remarked,—“A word to the wise is sufficient for them.” Half a word is enough for some people, who are shrewd and far-seeing, if they are not wise in the best interpretation of the word. Feeling, therefore, that this evening would probably be the crisis of her fate, she very soon made some excuse to Mrs. Hadfield for retiring to her own room, in order that she might reflect without disturbance, and decide upon the dress and ornaments she would wear on so important an occasion.

CHAPTER V.

"ON HER BEST BEHAVIOUR."

"A verb must agree with its nominative case, in number and person."—LINDLEY MURRAY.

It was long before Mrs. Shrosbery could decide upon the most becoming costume for the evening, although, being still in mourning, her choice was limited. Assisted by her maid, she turned over her dresses, only to find herself

dissatisfied with them all; if she had had but a few more hours' notice, she might have gone to her dressmaker, and insisted upon something entirely new for the occasion. All she could do now was to grumble, and worry that much-enduring young woman, Nancy Prettywell, whom she had engaged as personal attendant during her stay in Bath.

"What am I to do?" inquired Mrs. Shrosbery, at length, in utter despair. "The fact is, I have nothing at all fit to put on, Prettywell! you ought to have been more considerate. What is the use of keeping your own maid, if you are to be bothered in this way?—a lord coming to dinner, and not a dress in all my wardrobe that is in the least *distingué*!"

Prettywell looked askance at all the handsome robes that were spread forth for her mistress's inspection. There were rich silks, and satins, and *moires*—several of them quite new, and made in the very latest fashion; but they all had one supreme fault; they were *black*, and Mrs. Shrosbery hated black with an excessive and inextinguishable hatred. Nevertheless, as widows—those, at least, who are not of the Society of Friends—are expected to wear sable garments for an indefinite period, she had, as a matter of course, donned the garb of woe, and covered herself with bombazine and crape, till she looked not unlike a perambulatory hearse or mourning coach. And equally of course, she had proclaimed her intention to mourn in deepest "weeds" for the remaining term of her natural existence. She tired, however, of crape and bombazine in less than six months, and began to add a little smart bugle trimming and a few jet ornaments; and very soon she allowed herself to be persuaded to dispense with the ugly orthodox cap, which so spoilt her beautiful hair, and gave her nervous headaches. Still, though by this time bombazines had given place to silks and even satins, and though not a vestige of crape, save a few graceful folds of aereophane, was to be seen upon her comely person, it necessarily followed that she wore black only; hence her difficulty.

"You must wear that lovely satin, ma'am, which you have never put on yet since it came home from Madame

Marie's. It becomes you wonderful, and shows off your figure to perfection."

"It doesn't look quite so gloomy as the silks," replied the lady, "but it *is* black! How I wish I had a pale lavender, or a delicate French grey, or something of that sort! And really, Prettywell, it's too bad of you not to have thought of it; a person in your position should always be ready on an emergency."

"No doubt," thought Prettywell; "but who would ever have dreamed of a fifteen months' widow wanting to go into the lightest complimentary mourning at a moment's notice?"

But she said no word, for Prettywell was a thoroughly trained Abigail, and knew her place and her mistress's temper likewise. She only suggested that as it was quite impossible to have a new dress in readiness by eight o'clock that evening, Mrs. Shrosbery had better take kindly to the thick, glossy satin, which she had impatiently tossed aside, and have it tastefully trimmed up with lace and white rucheings, or anything else that would take away from it the appearance of actual mourning.

"Can you do it?" asked Louisa, eagerly, jumping at the proposition. "Will there be time? And do you think it would look strange if I wore some of my jewels? I am so sick of jet."

"I know I can do it, ma'am," replied Prettywell; "I have got all I want. I can make the dress look most elegant. As to the ornaments, pearls are always worn in mourning—that is to say, in *demi-deuil*, which black satin and lace is, and no mistake. Don't fear, ma'am, I'll be bound you go in to dinner to-night the best dressed lady as sits down to table!"

This important question being settled, and the black satin fairly in process of ornamentation, Mrs. Shrosbery was able to give herself up to meditations of a more serious character. She had never in all her life spoken to a real nobleman, City knights having been hitherto the most exalted personages with whom she had been on speaking terms, and she was much exercised in her mind on the subject of the etiquette which was supposed to pre-

vail among the upper ten thousand. Of course, she must address the Earl as "my lord" and "your lordship." She knew so much from certain Mansion House experiences; but, oh dear, how should she ever sustain a conversation properly? She was "a good one for making fun," her Peter had often told her; but then she had a shrewd suspicion that some of her jokes were just a little too broad for aristocratic listeners; nor was she quite certain about her "parts of speech." She had never learned any grammar in the days of her youth, but in later years, with a laudable view to self-improvement, she had studied her Lindley Murray, without, however, being very much the wiser. All she gained from her self-imposed task was a cursory knowledge of her "parts of speech," and she thought she could discriminate between a verb and a noun, though the *conjugations*, with all their inflexions of mood and tense, remained the most inscrutable of mysteries.

When she had dismissed Prettywell, she again drew forth the small school-grammar, which she always kept at hand, together with a pocket dictionary, a ready-reckoner, and "Hints on Etiquette," and once more assured herself of the rule which demands "that a verb shall agree with its nominative case." She puzzled over that rule, and the next one, till she lost patience, and flung down the book in absolute disgust. "What's the good of writing such *stuff*?" she said, crossly, feeling much inclined to toss the unoffending little volume behind the fire. "'A verb must agree with its nominative case!' Well, and what then? Let it agree! I am sure I have no objection, if I only knew how to make it agree, and if I had the least idea what the nominative case really meant. And what has that to do with talking properly? I can't see the connection between a verb and its nominative case and the right way of speaking. And if I could, I should never remember it just at the right time. I am sure the trouble that first rule of syntax has given me no one would believe, and I am no nearer understanding it now than I was when I first opened the grammar-book. I dare not think about the twenty-one rules that come after; a glance at them is enough to turn one's brain. What in the world is a disjunctive conjunction, and why

has it an effect contrary to that of the conjunction copulative? And what's a *noun of multitude*? And then, again!—"Relative pronouns must always agree with their antecedents!" Mr. Hadfield said something about *my* antecedents the other day, and he recommended me not to refer to them, even casually. I don't see why my antecedents should be less important than the pronoun's antecedents! And what can it matter whether the pronouns and their antecedents quarrel or not? All I care about is being able to talk like a lady born. I would not, for worlds, come out with anything ungrammatical before my lord; and how *can* I help it if I don't know what is grammatical and what isn't? And this stupid book will never make me a bit the wiser, not even if I learn it all by heart, every word of it, from Orthography to Prosody, which doesn't seem to mean anything at all! I wish I had thought of taking a few lessons last winter; I might have done it on the quiet at Cheltenham so nicely, and no one been the wiser. I might have said my health was delicate as a girl, so that my education was rather neglected, and that I wished just to refresh my memory, and all that. How could I be so stupid, when I had quite made up my mind to marry into the peerage? And there is nobody I could consult; my old friends know no more than I do, and perhaps not so much, and I don't like to expose myself to new and genteel acquaintances. I wonder if I could get anything out of Mrs. Hadfield! She is a lady, and must know grammar, and rhetoric, and versification, and all, of course. There is the luncheon bell; I have a great mind to try the old lady! She isn't one to sneer at you because you are not as well educated as you might be."

And with this determination Mrs. Shrosbery went down to luncheon, and apologised for her morning seclusion upstairs. "Do not say a word, my dear," replied Mrs. Hadfield; "I never interfere with my guests in the morning, unless there is some plan of shopping or going to one of the picture galleries. I leave them to their own devices, only letting them know what time the carriage is coming round."

"I wonder if that is the way in fashionable circles now, in tip-top society!" mused Mrs. Shrosbery; but, being

discreet, she ate her cold chicken in silence, and spoke no word till the servant in attendance had left the room, which he did very quickly, it being the custom of the Hadfields to do without much waiting on at luncheon time. As soon, however, as the ladies were alone, Mrs. Shrosbery commenced, "Dear Mrs. Hadfield, I have such a favour to ask of you. Of course you know *grammar*?"

The old lady looked a little surprised. "No," she answered, "I really cannot say I am anything of a grammarian. I learned grammar at school, just as most girls did in my day, without a very clear understanding of what it meant. If you want to come to a conclusion on any knotty point, you had better consult Mr. Hadfield. He thoroughly understands the English language, which I do not, as I am entirely ignorant of Latin."

"What *has* that to do with it? You cannot mean that you must learn Latin in order to understand English?"

"In order to understand it *thoroughly* you certainly must know something, at least, of Latin, or how are you to get at the roots of words?"

Mrs. Shrosbery had no idea that words had roots. Trees and plants had roots she knew, but how words came to have them she could not at all imagine; so she put by the phrase for future consideration, and for use when needed.

"But, my dear Mrs. Hadfield," she continued, "how did you learn to talk so beautifully, if you never understood your grammar?"

"I learned to talk *by ear*, as thousands of people do."

"By ear? I don't think I understand."

"Do we not all learn to speak our own language by ear? We learn, as little children, from those about us."

"Oh, yes, of course; but I was alluding to something more than mere talking. Can a person who knows no grammar converse in his or her own language with propriety?"

"Undoubtedly, if the person is accustomed to hear only correct speaking. Bad habits in this respect are easily contracted; in early life especially, we catch almost imperceptibly the accent and provincial errors of others. A princess or any lady of rank would, probably, from mere

usage, speak with perfect grace and propriety, even though she never learned a page of grammar."

"Then what on earth is the use of grammar?"

"It is of so much use that you could scarcely write your own language correctly without it. Indeed, I suppose without it one might miss some of the finer points, even in speaking it. But, my dear, what does all this tend to? Are you thinking of making a special study of grammar?"

"I have thought of it, and I have read my grammar-book through *carefully*, from beginning to end, half-a-dozen times at least, and I am not an inch the forwarder."

"The forwarder in what, my dear?"

"In knowing how to speak correctly and elegantly. There! I may as well tell the truth at once. I'm not an educated person, Mrs. Hadfield—not as well educated as I might be—and I want to know how best I can make up for past deficiencies. I've heaps and heaps of money, Mr. Hadfield says, and so I don't see why I shouldn't keep first-rate company, if only I can make myself fit for it."

The old lady, who, gentle and retiring as she was, knew very well how to put two and two together—gentleness and modesty being compatible with a good deal of keen perception—began to see pretty clearly what was disquieting her usually self-satisfied and rather consequential visitor. She at once understood the delicate dilemma. Lord Orwell was asked on Mrs. Shrosbery's account, and Mrs. Shrosbery's misgivings were all on Lord Orwell's account. And the widow, notwithstanding her desire to speak elegantly, said to herself—though only to herself, of course—"Ah! *she smells a rat*. So much the better. If only she would give me a hint now!"

"My dear," said Mrs. Hadfield, gravely, "I think I understand you. In the first place, console yourself with the reflection that a golden key means 'open sesame,' under nearly all circumstances. If charity covers a multitude of sins, money covers a multitude of deficiencies. And in the second place, believe me—and forgive me if I speak too plainly—you may pass muster in what is called '*society*' very fairly, if only you take common pains, maintain a cer-

tain self-control, and correct one or two little mistakes which, now and then, you fall into."

"Oh! do tell me what mistakes, and I shall be everlastingly obliged to you, dearest Mrs. Hadfield."

"You must not say '*you was*,' nor '*was you?*' nor '*we was*,' nor '*they was*.' Any one of these expressions stamps you at once as—as—well, perhaps I had better say, as *very* 'middle class!' And, if I understand aright, you aspire to something quite beyond middle-class associations?"

"Of course I do; and why should I not? I always was ambitious, Mrs. Hadfield; from a child I always had a notion of rising in life, and I have rose, and mean to rise, whatever it may cost."

"Very well; then you must say '*have risen!*' '*Have rose*' is incorrect English."

"Why is it?"

"Ah! there my ignorance comes in the way. Of course there is a rule about that very thing; indeed, I know there is something about the past participle and the past tense—my memory serves me so far. But I could not explain it, even to myself; I only know from mere habitude that '*have risen*' is pure English, and that '*have rose*' is the reverse. And, my dear, if you mean to mix in high society, you *must* take the tone, and speak the language, of the people with whom you associate."

When Mr. Hadfield came into his wife's room that evening, while she was dressing for dinner, she gave him to understand that she had fathomed his designs, and that she was not quite sure that he was doing the best thing for either of his clients.

"My dear," said Mr. Hadfield impatiently—he always said "*my dear*" when he was rather cross, and "*mother*" when he was perfectly good-tempered—"you know nothing whatever about it. Lord Orwell is ruined if he do not speedily secure an immense sum of money: he wants hard cash, she wants a titled husband. A fairer exchange could no one desire."

"Well, my dear, you know best," replied the gentle little lady, quite meekly. She believed implicitly in her husband, and she was used to being snubbed. "*But*, do you think he will take to her?"

"What is there to hinder?" replied the lawyer. "When a man is starving to death, he is not likely to quarrel with a plain leg of mutton because it isn't ortolans or venison. I tell you Lord Orwell has but the one alternative—Mrs. Shrosbery, or hopeless, irremediable ruin! And, after all, he might have a far harder fate than to accept a rich and handsome bride, with plenty to say for herself, and a very amiable disposition."

"I am not sure about that. I think Mrs. Shrosbery is selfish; I should not wonder if she do not turn out exacting and jealous. She is just the kind of woman to be perpetually imagining slights, and urging her own petty claims. And as for being handsome—though she is a fine woman, I grant—I should scarcely imagine that her charms would subdue the man who knows so well what perfect feminine beauty really is."

"Nonsense! You women never have a good word for each other; you are so jealous of each other's praises! Mrs. Shrosbery has not the refined loveliness of the late Countess, I grant you; nevertheless, she is, in my opinion, a remarkably handsome woman, and she is witty and amusing, and has a fine flow of spirits. And some men, you know, prefer tulips to Belladonna lilies!"

"Well, they are both old enough to know their own minds," replied Mrs. Hadfield, quietly. "A man of forty can scarcely complain of being influenced, and a woman of Mrs. Shrosbery's age is quite competent to discern what is gold and what is only glitter. All the advice in the world would be thrown away upon her; to warn either of them would be to waste one's breath."

"It would, indeed, and I must request that you will not attempt anything of the kind. You and I have nothing to do with the possible alliance; we simply introduce the Earl to the widow, and the widow to the Earl; we are no matchmakers, and have, therefore, no future responsibilities. All that may follow depends upon the parties themselves; and, as you remark, they may both be safely left to look after their own interests. Now, make haste and finish dressing; it is quite time you were in the drawing-room."

A quarter of an hour later, and the fateful introduc-

tion had taken place. Louisa fell in love at first sight! She had never seen so handsome, so noble-looking, so courtly a man in all her life! How different from poor Peter, who was short and stout, and squinted a little with one eye, and never could be persuaded to dress properly for dinner! The Earl was altogether charming; and what a soft voice he had, and what a nice little click he gave to his words, and how smoothly he turned his sentences! Then, with what a grace he led her in to dinner, and how delightfully he talked, and how sweetly he smiled, and seemed to take it for granted that she had moved always in aristocratic circles!

As for the Earl's impressions, they were of a widely different character. He had not the smallest wish to marry again; he had promised himself that he would be faithful to Clarissa's memory; and even supposing he were inclined to make another choice, the widow Shrobery would most certainly *not* be the woman of his selection. "Still, it might have been worse," he soliloquised; "she might have dropped her h's, which she does not; though, to my taste, she aspirates a little too strongly. Her voice is rather harsh, and she laughs too loudly; but all that may be amended. And her beauty—such as it is—is not my style, a little coarse, in fact. She will have a red face in a few years, and my prophetic soul tells me she will be enormously stout; besides, that very dark hair is apt to turn to such an ugly iron-grey, and she owns to being thirty-five, Hadfield says. I daresay she is forty, though she does not look it; but women, except the very young ones, always try to pass for being younger than they are. I suppose, though, I should have to take her if she were fifty-five, or even older, and 'ruddier than the cherry,' and as fat as a prize porker. Her money will set me on my legs again, it will retrieve all my losses, and turn me from a titled pauper into a wealthy nobleman. And then she will take Clarissa in hand. Dear me, it will be an excellent thing for the child to have some one to look after her. I had not thought of that. Of course, she ought not to be left so entirely to servants. I begin to see that there is every reason why I should marry again. At the same time, I wish it had been a slightly different

kind of woman that had fallen to my share. Well, we cannot have everything, and I have had blood and beauty in my wives, now I must go in for money, and of that, thank heaven! there is no lack. How do these vulgar tradespeople contrive to get so rich, I wonder?"

"Well," interrogated Mr. Hadfield, under the hall lamp that evening, while the Earl's cab waited at the door, "is it to be a match?"

"Yes," said Lord Orwell, in a surly tone. "It's of no use quarrelling with your bread-and-butter when it's a question of one particular loaf or none at all. You are perfectly sure about the money?"

"You shall see old Peter's will to-morrow, and, when you have quite made up your mind, I can show you documents that will rather surprise you. The fact is, Mrs. Shrosbery herself does not know how immensely rich she is."

"I have made up my mind." And Lord Orwell stepped into his cab and drove away, while Mr. Hadfield returned to the drawing-room, and rallied the widow on her obvious conquest. He was surprised to see the colour mount into her cheeks, as she lowered her eyelids, and smiled very faintly.

"Why, I do believe she is really *hit*!" he said to his wife afterwards. "So much the better."

"So much the better for her; but is the Earl 'hit,' as you call it?"

"I should say not; but he has no idea of drawing back. It will be a match, mother; and Lord Orwell, if he have a scruple of sense or a grain of gratitude, will bless me to his life's end. I thought Mrs. Shrosbery looked extremely well to-night—those pearls in her hair suited exactly; but how quiet she was! I suppose she felt a little nervous."

"She is very wise to be quiet. She is much more attractive in her quiet moods than when she rattles away without much regard to what she is saying, or how she says it. She has been on her best behaviour to-night."

"Well, I suppose she has. A prudent woman, and knows a thing or two! There are just a few points on which you might give her a gentle hint. There is something about her laugh! it is either affected or noisy, and

as Countess of Orwell she must learn to modulate her voice a little. She is really a fine creature. What a pity she is not the Earl's equal by birth! But, if she were, she would scarcely possess the splendid fortune which adds so largely to her powers of fascination."

The next evening Lord Orwell "dropped in," as Louisa said, "quite promiscuous," and the business of courting commenced in real earnest. A few days more and the engagement was formally announced. Mr. Hadfield at once undertook the settlements; one half of the widow's fortune was to be secured to her and to her heirs for ever, the other half went to pay the noble bridegroom's debts, and disencumber the estates. The marriage—which was, after all, not deferred to the close of Louisa's second year of widowhood—was to take place at St. James', Piccadilly, from the house of the Honourable Miss Oakleigh, Lord Orwell's ancient spinster aunt.

CHAPTER VI.

A WEDDING-DAY IN JANUARY.

"Ah, bitter chill it was;
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold."

"The bridegroom spake low, and led onward the bride,
And before the high altar they stood side by side;
The rite book is opened, the rite is begun,
They have knelt down together to rise up as one.
Who laughed by the altar?"

AND so Mrs. Shrosbery became Countess of Orwell, at St. James', Piccadilly, one bitter morning, early in the New Year. The Earl had gallantly pleaded for an earlier day, for he sorely wanted his Louisa's money, and only as her husband could he lay his hands upon it. Of course, the great weight of his liabilities was lifted from his shoulders

the moment he formally announced his engagement to the rich widow of Peter Shrosbery; those creditors who had been as roaring and ramping lions, impatiently seeking after what was left to them to devour, became on the instant mild as lambs, and professed themselves entirely ready to wait his lordship's convenience; while the very Shylocks of the money-lenders, who had helped so largely to his undoing, became—in words, at least—as confiding and considerate as the most disinterested Gentile. And yet the Earl knew well enough that if anything happened to break off the proposed alliance, all this false peace would be at an end, the truce would be quickly over, and he must fall alive into the hands of his enemies, or put the sea between himself and British shores—possibly for ever.

Naturally, therefore, he was anxious to redeem all those fair promises so liberally given; and the delay on which the bride-elect insisted was as irksome to him as if he had been a youthful lover waiting with ardent desire for the happy day of union. He had quite intended that his marriage should take place soon after the close of the London season—at least, early in the autumn; but Louisa would not listen to his pleadings. She had him safely now; she was not at all afraid of being jilted, and she so much enjoyed the excitement of courtship that she determined to sustain the interesting character of *fiancée* as long as possible. She could not put aside her mourning under eighteen months, and then it would be the height of indecency to rush out of black straight into bridal finery. Besides, the Countess Clarissa had not been in her grave quite as long as her “sainted Peter” had been in his, and, indeed, she must protest against anything like undue haste and disrespect to her memory. Then there were her clothes! She must have a *trousseau* worthy of his rank and her own position; it would be utterly impossible to be ready much before Christmas. In short, she was resolved not to forego one iota of her woman's privileges; she would be honourably wooed and wedded in the sight of the whole world. For well she knew the difference between husbands and suitors; and she could not but perceive that her lordly *futur*, though behaving in proper lovely fashion before folk, was by no means as ardent a lover as he

might have been. Peter, poor fellow, made a deal more fuss with her; and as for her girlish sweethearts—the Whitechapel butcher included—they were ten times more enthusiastic and showed their affection ever so much plainer than this grandly-descended nobleman, who, however, could place a coronet on her brow, and make her “my lady” for life! And shrewdly she suspected that she was now getting all the love-making she ever was to know, that the wedding once over she would cease to queen it over the Earl himself, and, therefore, it behoved her to keep him at her feet to the last moment, and to defer the final act of the drama as long as it might be expedient.

Then when December arrived, and the appointed day was close at hand, there came some little hitch with the settlements, and the lady, backed by her lawyer, postponed the ceremony till all should be in proper form and readiness; and as people of rank are never married during the Christmas holidays, they must wait till at least the middle of January, by which time it might be hoped that the necessary arrangements would be complete. Only February, she had been given to understand, was a much more lucky month in which to marry! January was excellent for worldly prosperity, but very bad for the affections. February, June, and September were, of all months in the year, the best in which to contract matrimony. Why not, then, wait till February, and secure the felicity of an ever-deepening and never-ending mutual attachment?

The Earl almost lost his temper—almost forgot himself—while Louisa, with coquettish smiles and glances, proposed a further delay. He did mutter something about “old woman’s nonsense,” and he swore a little under his breath; but it became him in such case to evince impatience, and swearing was rather an accomplishment than otherwise in the days of the Regency. And so Mrs. Shrosbery was in no wise offended; only—being, as her Peter had declared, a woman of discernment—she very wisely forbore to push her advantage. She modestly yielded to my lord’s importunities, which gathered strength as he remembered the importunities of his creditors, some of whom

had begun to look suspiciously on this extended courtship ; and the marriage was finally and definitively fixed for a certain day in January, about five weeks distant, and Louisa perfectly understood that from that decision there could be, and must be, no appeal.

The last month of her widowed life Mrs. Shrosbery spent under the roof of the Honourable Miss Oakleigh, who, while she fully appreciated the fortune of the bride, strenuously objected to the bride herself. Miss Oakleigh had but a limited income, and she was niggardly likewise ; she loved to accumulate this world's gear, and parsimony was her ruling passion. She knew she could not fail to be the better for Mrs. Shrosbery's temporary residence under her roof—that is, in a pecuniary point of view ; and she must certainly reap much benefit from the celebration of the nuptials under her immediate auspices, the whole affair being conducted regardless of expense, at the bride-elect's own cost. And then, Mrs. Shrosbery gave more wedding presents than she received ; and Aunt Lavinia became the happy possessor of a splendid diamond brooch, such as for brilliancy and actual worth had never before graced her rather scantily furnished jewel-case.

It was "bitter cold" on the wedding morning. A good deal of snow had fallen, and then there had come a partial, sudden thaw, quickly followed by intensest frost, almost amounting to that dismal state of things which our French neighbours call "*le verglas*." And, at one time, it seemed to be doubtful whether there would be any wedding at all that day, unless the bridal party, in list slippers, *walked* to church. However, as neither bride nor bridegroom cared how large were their expenses, and as the distance to St. James' was not great, superhuman efforts were made to supersede natural obstacles. Every horse was re-roughed, and the streets were hastily sanded—or strewn, rather, with whatever *débris* came most readily to hand—and in due time the church was reached, and the prelate, who had been specially retained for the ceremony, made his appearance in his snowiest lawn sleeves at the altar rails, and at once commenced the marriage service.

"Wilt thou have this man?" "Wilt thou have this woman?" A couple of "*I wills*," and a few half-whis-

pered and wholly inaudible words, by way of exchanging vows, the transfer of a ring, and the business was done. The Right Reverend my Lord Bishop joined the hands of the plighted pair, and pronounced them "Man and wife together, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." And the lady who had entered the church as Louisa, relict of Peter Shrosbery, Esquire, left it as Louisa, Countess of Orwell.

But, oh! how cold it was! In those days, the apparatus for warming public buildings was dreadfully defective. It was generally contrived that the temperature of the church should be at freezing point, just a degree or two higher than that of the vaults beneath; or that the flues should be overheated, and the sacred edifice consumed by fire. Fortunately for London, St. James', Piccadilly, escaped conflagration. Unfortunately for the bridal party, a combination of frost and stupidity kept the flues as cold as charity, and the bride's teeth chattered while she signed her name, and Miss Lavinia sneezed seven times on her way home to Clarges Street. The breakfast was not a success, though the Bishop was present, and there was wine enough to drown him, should he desire that mode of translation.

The bride's white satin looked too much like the newly-frozen snow, and her jewels sparkled but faintly in the grey and sunless day, which grew chillier and mistier after noontide, and so dark that lamps had to be lighted before the banquet had fairly commenced. Speeches were made, and toasts were drunk, and champagne was spilt, and the guests wished the cold meats were hot, and nobody so much as looked at the pine-apple ice. While the bride withdrew to change her dress and drink warm negus, the bridegroom indulged in a large tumblerful of strong smoking toddy; and there was not a man or woman present who did not commiserate the luckless pair, doomed by the miserable decrees of fashion to travel in such inclement weather.

Miss Oakleigh was only too thankful to behold their departure, to say good-bye to the wedding guests, and to retire to her own sitting-room, where she could toast her feet on the fender, and nurse her incipient influenza.

And so the lady won her coronet, and the gentleman effectually replenished his exchequer.

Meanwhile, Clarissa had been accommodated with a governess, a Miss Rigby, who had the reputation of being a person of a strong mind and superior judgment, Mrs. Sweetapple herself being chiefly responsible for the lady's introduction. Miss Rigby was tall and thin, with piercing black eyes, and a great hooked nose like a parrot's beak. She was of an uncertain age, but she affected youth in her dress and manners, and she liked the idea of being governess to a nobleman's daughter. She would have been less pleased with her engagement had she known the peculiarities of her future pupil. The housekeeper, being in disgrace with her young mistress, deputed to Nurse Barlow the pleasing task of preparing Lady Clarissa for the arrival of her instructress. "Do you know, my lady, I have such a surprise for you?" said that astute personage, as she combed and curled the child's hair before putting her to bed. "What *do* you think is going to happen?"

"I don't know, I am sure," replied Lady Clarissa, carelessly. "Am I going to have that retriever pup that Tom Bates promised me? Do you think he will be good after the rats?"

"Oh, my lady, it's time you began to think less about dogs, and cats, and rats, and beasts generally, and more about your books. No, it isn't a dog you are to have; there are too many dogs about the place already; my lord said so the last time he came down to Orwell."

"Is it *anything* alive?" asked Lady Clarissa, feeling her curiosity suddenly stimulated. She had quite a menagerie of her own, indoors and out-of-doors; she never seemed so happy as when enjoying the society of her pets, and she was continually adding to their number. She had a cat, of course, and puss was allowed to bring up an unprecedented family of kittens; she had a large dog, a tame bullfinch, a green linnet, a squalling cockatoo, a vicious raven, a squirrel, an old donkey, some white mice, a lot of rabbits, a lame duck, and a little fat pig! And besides these creatures, which she considered her private property, she was on intimate terms with all

the animals on the estate—in field, and yard, and stable ; to say nothing of an enormous toad which she fed daily, and which came at her call, and followed her up and down the garden-walks, and even, upon occasion, into the house.

And nurse answered gravely, “Yes, my lady, something alive, sure enough.”

“Oh, *what* is it ?” cried the child eagerly. “If you don’t tell me, I’ll run away, and you sha’n’t catch me till ever so late !”

“Oh, fie, fie, Lady Clarissa ! That is not a pretty way to talk ; and don’t jerk yourself about so, I can’t curl your hair properly. Can’t you guess, now ? Try.”

“If it isn’t a dog, perhaps it is a pony. Is it anything I want ?”

“Something you want, certainly,” replied nurse, with emphasis ; “that is to say, something you really need, and something, too, that I hope you will like very much ; something that is coming *entirely on your own account*.”

“It is something I shall not like, I am sure,” said the child, twisting herself round and confronting her nurse. “I know by the way you speak it is something very nasty ! It is not that horrid governess that Sweetie said would keep me in order, I suppose ?”

“Now what a clever young lady you are ! You are the one to guess right ! Yes ; you are going to have a governess all to yourself like other young ladies, and she will teach you to read, and write, and play music, and draw pictures, and to behave prettily.”

“I don’t want to learn to read or to write, and I can play music, and I can draw pictures—I drew the spotted cow and her calf only yesterday ; and I *won’t* have the governess !”

Now Nurse Barlow knew from long experience that when her young lady spoke in that quiet, decided tone, persuasion and argument were alike useless. Obstinacy was certainly Lady Clarissa’s prevailing characteristic, and when once she had declared her intentions there was but little chance of inducing her to renounce them. There would certainly be battle royal between Miss Rigby and

her pupil. Nurse only hoped that the lady would be equal to the emergency when it arrived.

"When is she—the stupid governess-thing—coming?" asked Lady Clarissa, finding that nurse made no rejoinder. "And who sends her here?"

"Miss Rigby comes to-morrow, my lady; and my lord, your papa, said it was high time you had some one to teach you and look after you, for you won't mind Mrs. Sweetapple nor me. And you are quite too old to go running about digging and delving, and nursing your animals any longer."

"Do you mean she won't let me run about all day, and go into the stables and the cow-house, and feed the rabbits, and the calves, and the little pigs? And sha'n't I dig potatoes when I have a mind?"

"Now, my lady, just ask yourself if the stables and the cow-house are the proper places for a nobleman's daughter! Why, the poor village children dig potatoes and feed pigs."

"I don't care! I wish I were a village child! I hate being a nobleman's daughter, I do! And I won't have this governess, so it is of no use her coming. I'll have nothing to do with her, and you had better send her back again, straight away."

"A pretty look-out for Miss Rigby," said Mrs. Sweetapple, when nurse duly reported the result of her communication. "She'll have a nice handful with my young lady."

"Yes, but she'll manage her," continued the house-keeper; "Miss Rigby is one that knows how to be obeyed, and she will soon teach our young lady that it is of no use to rebel. She is very strict with children, I am told—indeed, for meek children she is quite too strict, I should say; but such a little termagant as our Lady Clarissa needs a tight hand over her, and she'll get it. There will be fine rows at first, no doubt; but Miss Rigby will soon settle who shall be mistress."

Now, in the engagement of Clarissa's governess, a great error had been, at the very outset of the affair, committed. Lord Orwell went his way, and thought no more of his promise to Mrs. Sweetapple, till that excel-

lent woman, being really alarmed at the child's wild pranks, and shocked at her tom-boy propensities, wrote to him, humbly but urgently entreating him to be as good as his word, and without any more delay "see about the governess." Lord Orwell hated trouble, and he really did not know to whom to apply, for his old friend, Lady Ridley, was dead, and Aunt Lavinia at once declined the responsibility. So he wrote back to his housekeeper, telling her to advertise and inquire among her own friends for a suitable young person, only she had better not be too young, for then she would be inexperienced; and she need not be a first-class governess, as her pupil would merely require the rudiments at present; but it would be quite necessary that she should be a strict disciplinarian, and accustomed to exact obedience and respect.

Accordingly Mrs. Sweetapple set to work, and through her friend, Mrs. Field, she soon heard of "just the very person to bring an unruly, headstrong child into proper order." And references being satisfactory, Miss Rigby was quickly engaged, though she was by no means a gentlewoman, and though she had a fierce, despotic temper, and was by nature cast in a harsh, unloving mould. But she was declared to be an excellent "child-tamer," having had considerable experience with refractory pupils, all of whom she had conquered and brought into wholesome subjection. Obstinacy was the strong point in Lady Clarissa's character, and firmness was Miss Rigby's prime virtue. It never occurred to Mrs. Sweetapple that grown-up obstinacy commonly ranks as "firmness," and that to bring one strong will into antagonism with another, which is simply stronger on account of superior age, is not always the wisest course to follow. But no one knew what the poor child really needed—she was wild, and she must be tamed; she was wilful, and she must be subdued; she was ignorant, and she must be instructed; and so they gave her into the keeping of one whose only idea of discipline was tyranny, and who knew no other force than that of stern compulsion.

Nurse Barlow sighed, and hoped the new governess would not be too hard upon the dear child, and crush

her spirit; for she really loved her troublesome little charge, and was, indeed, the only person who could at all control her. Mrs. Sweetapple thought it just as well that the spirit of defiance and revolt should be broken, and *she* hoped that Miss Rigby would hold the reins as tightly as possible, and teach Lady Clarissa that she could no longer have her own way and set her elders at defiance.

And Clarissa having spoken her mind, went quietly to bed, though not to sleep. Hours afterwards, when Nurse Barlow looked in upon her, she found the child sitting upright, with tightly clasped hands, compressed lips, and knitted eyebrows—she was evidently as wide awake as she could be.

“Oh, for shame, my lady!” said nurse. “Do you know what time it is? On the stroke of twelve, as I’m a living woman, and you not gone to sleep yet!”

“I am not going to sleep,” replied Clarissa, gravely; “I have a great deal to think about.”

“What can a child like you have to think about, I should like to know? There, lie down and go to sleep, and think in the morning when you get up.”

“I do not wish to lie down; I am settling what I am to do with the governess-thing that is coming.”

“Then I hope, my lady, you are settling to behave to her as a good young lady should; for it’s full time you were brought under, and she is not one, as I am assured, to stand any nonsense.”

“She will not bring *me* under,” quoth Clarissa, with sparkling eyes.

“Ah, well, we shall see. She has her own way of managing naughty little girls. She has had plenty of practice, and knows how to deal with them, and you’ll find that you have to obey her. Why, she comes here on purpose to be obeyed.”

“Does she?” replied the young lady, significantly. “I think she had better stay away, then; I am not going to be ruled by a servant.”

“She is not a servant, my lady; she is a *governess*, and governesses must be treated accordingly.”

“Accordingly—how? Will she be paid for—for—looking after me?”

"Of course she will. She will be paid handsomely."

"Then she *is* a servant! and I am not going to have any servant over me, except you, now and then, nurse, when you are very nice. When I do what you tell me, it is because I like you, not because you are my mistress—for, of course, I am yours, and I shall be hers. And now I think you had better leave me, and go to bed yourself; it is quite time *you* were fast asleep. Old women ought not to sit up so late."

CHAPTER VII.

ALL ALONE IN THE WOOD.

"Two words, indeed, of praying we remember,
And at midnight's hour of harm,
'Our Father,' looking upward in the chamber,
We say softly for a cha-m."

ALL the next day Clarissa was remarkably quiet; she said very little to her human companions, though from time to time she whispered confidences to her tortoiseshell-kitten, and she had something especial to communicate to the dog, Tartar, the most favoured of her intimates. About four o'clock in the afternoon, she was dressed in a clean white-muslin frock, tied up with black ribbons; her best black sash was fastened round her waist, her face and hands were made clean, and her elf-locks reduced to order. She submitted with a better grace than usual to the tedious and despised ceremonial, and nurse began to hope that, after all, her young lady, who had plenty of sense and rather too much for a child of her age, was going to accept the inevitable, and make the best of her fate, whatever it might be. "There," said nurse, as she fastened a jet necklace round the child's skinny yellow neck, "now take your pretty picture-book, or your box of letters, or your Noah's ark if you like, and sit still, and

don't mess your frock, nor your hair, there's a lady-bird ! I want you to look like a new pin when Miss Rigby comes."

"Will she be here soon?" inquired Clarissa.

"In less than half an hour if the London coach is to its time. No ! don't nurse that kitten, and don't let Tartar paw you ; I shall have to keep an eye upon you, I see."

There was an amused expression on the child's face that nurse did not notice, or she might have watched her a little more closely. They were in the schoolroom, which had been duly prepared for the new *régime*. Mrs. Sweetapple had ransacked some boxes of books, which had long been shut up in the unused garrets in the roof, and finding a number of children's school Catechisms and Histories, some of them half a century old, she had dusted them and arranged them on a set of oaken shelves for Clarissa's benefit ; and she had provided a brand-new slate, a sponge, a packet of pencils, some single-line copy-books, and ink and goose-quills at discretion. An imposing-looking, well-cushioned chair was set throne-like at one end of the baize-covered table, and a tall, narrow, upright chair, of the species called "educational," at the other. An ancient harpsichord, that had been untouched for no one knew how many years, had also been tuned and rubbed up, and placed in the apartment, which was henceforth to be known in the household as—the schoolroom. It was on the shady side of the house, on the first floor, and looked upon a broad piece of neglected garden, and a sort of half-wild shrubbery, half wilderness, beyond.

Clarissa seemed so occupied with the picture of Cinderella giving her first audience to her fairy godmother, that nurse left her, in order to count over the clean linen, which had just come in from the laundry. There were several best towels short, so she went downstairs to make inquiries, and while she was still busy at the presses, the news came that Miss Rigby had arrived. Mrs. Sweetapple hastened to receive her with all ceremony ; nurse waited a little in the background, anxious to see for herself what kind of person had been selected for the discharge of such important duties.

Her first impression was not a pleasant one. The

governess looked, she thought, extremely stern, ill-tempered, and cross-grained.

"She's not the one for a child like my Lady Clarissa," said nurse to herself, as she marked the sharp, curt manner, the haughty bearing, and the morose expression of the unlovely countenance before her. "She's got a dreadful nose, and a shocking voice, and I never could bear those thin, straight lips. Why, she looks for all the world like a cruel hawk, swooping down on a defenceless little chicken! And she is no lady, no more than I am; I know a gentlewoman when I see one!"

And nurse was right; Miss Rigby had not a drop of gentle blood in all her veins; there were cruelty and harshness in her sardonic smile, and her general appearance was grim, and suggestive of vindictive tyranny. "Where is my pupil?" she inquired haughtily, looking around her; "she ought to be here to receive her instructress."

"Will you please to walk upstairs, ma'am?" said Mrs. Sweetapple, a little dismayed herself at the tone of authority. She knew very well that it would be in vain to require Lady Clarissa to pay her respects to her governess. She would not come of her own accord, and, if carried down by force, she would either scream and kick, and perhaps bite, under the compulsion, or she would relapse into a little heap of stolid, dumb, seemingly stupid sulkiness, which nothing but the most extreme measures could hope to dissipate.

"I will await my pupil here; it is her place to seek me, not mine to seek her. I shall begin as I mean to go on; I am accustomed to be treated with unwavering respect." And Miss Rigby seated herself, as she imagined, with much dignity; while nurse, at a sign from Mrs. Sweetapple, went upstairs to see if by any means Lady Clarissa could be coaxed, beguiled, or coerced into allowing herself to be presented to the governess. The schoolroom door was closed as she had left it, but Lady Clarissa was not within. Nurse called her softly and then loudly, and sought her in all the adjoining apartments; but no Lady Clarissa answered, nowhere could be discerned the fluttering of her white muslin, or her long black ribbons; she had mysteriously disappeared. Nurse was obliged to descend and

report the absence of Miss Rigby's pupil, much to that lady's disgust, and Mrs. Sweetapple's annoyance.

"She is up in the garrets, or else in the north-wing; those are her favourite hiding-places," said the housekeeper. "Go and look for her, Fancy."

Fanny Flann, commonly called "Fancy," was a rather pretty girl of fifteen or sixteen. She had been engaged to supplement the services of Nurse Barlow, who, being rheumatic, and lame in one leg, was unable to follow her erratic charge as closely and continually as was expedient. Fancy was supposed to be in constant attendance on her young lady, and she generally did her best to keep her out of any very flagrant piece of mischief, only now and then aiding and abetting her in revolt against the powers that be. She at once took part against the new governess, and determined to be a thorn in her side from the very day of her arrival. Fancy, now promoted to be schoolroom-maid, was a "Susan Nipper" sort of young woman, and the odds were that when she and Miss Rigby came to measure their strength, Miss Rigby would by no means gain the advantage. Demurely enough Fancy now obeyed the housekeeper, going into every room where she knew the child was not, searching every nook and cranny, and opening all the trunks and chests that happened to be unlocked, as if Clarissa were likely to emulate the luckless bride of the ancient Venetian story, who played unmatronly and fatal pranks on her wedding-day! After a while she returned, stating that she had looked high and low, and that Lady Clarissa could not be in the house; she must have gone out for a walk, and would, no doubt, soon return. But nurse and Mrs. Sweetapple shook their heads; they felt all too sure that their young lady had of *malice prepense* withdrawn herself to some secret place in order to signify her disapproval of Miss Rigby. The stables, the poultry-yard, the barns, and all the out-offices were then searched, and many inquiries were made, but no trace of Clarissa was to be obtained.

"Never mind," said Miss Rigby, when quite tired of waiting for the young rebel; "I am fatigued; I require rest and refreshment. Send Lady Clarissa to me the instant she returns. I shall severely reprimand her,

and inflict to-morrow a punishment equivalent to the offence."

"Laws-a-mercy!" said Fancy to nurse, as the governess retired, after ordering a liberal meat tea; "she don't no more know what my Lady Clarissa is to deal with than I know what the rack in the Tower of London is like, when it gets the grip of one! I should enjoy to see my lady submit to 'a punishment equivalent,' whatever that may be; or rather, I should not, for I should think she was taken for death if she knocked under to such as her."

"Do *you* know where my lady is?" asked nurse, with a keenly inquisitive glance.

"Now, Mrs. Barlow, as if it was likely I should know! I don't, but if I did, I am not sure that I should tell—not that she-dragon, any-ways! She'll turn up presently. I'll go and look down the park towards the lake."

"You don't think she has gone down there, and slipped in!" cried nurse, aghast at the terrible idea thus suddenly presented.

"Not a bit of it!" said Fancy; "she is not one to slip and stumble; I believe she could walk up the gable end of the house, or stand on the edge of a precipidge, or do any mortal thing she had a mind to, without coming to grief. She's more like a sprite than a child; she does all but fly."

"Well, go and look in the park, and you may as well see that the boats are all right. I shall send Tom Bates and Colin Smart to scour the woods. She must be found, you know."

It was dusk when Fancy returned with no news of the truant, and almost dark when the boys came in together, saying that "they had seed nuthin' and nobody." The situation began to be serious, not to say alarming, and Miss Rigby remarked that she had never before known such shocking behaviour; she felt quite "put about," and must have a dose of camphor-julep administered without delay.

And all the while Clarissa was about half-a-mile from home. As soon as nurse had left her, she rose, and telling Tartar not to follow her, slipped away into her own bedroom, where she seized a soft, warm shawl, and changed her thin house slippers for walking boots. In another

minute she was in the open air, having left the Castle by a window, in one of the lower rooms. She darted across the terrace on which she alighted, ran down the steps, through the neglected rose-garden, and gained the covert of a thicket of laurestinus and rhododendrons. From this point of the grounds it was only a step or two into the park itself; and not far away, just across the sunk fence and a few yards of smooth greensward, was a little copse, where the trees had not been thinned, nor the undergrowth cleared away, for many years. Thither Clarissa scudded, very much like a hare that fears the dogs are on her scent, and in a few minutes found herself safe under shelter of the wood.

"Suppose I climb one of the trees," she said aloud, as she surveyed her position. "They *might* come here and find me, but they never would think of looking up there; and the branches are so thick, I could hide myself quite well if they did. Nobody but Fancy knows how I can climb, and she won't tell."

No sooner said than done. There was one spreading oak, with boughs sufficiently near the ground, and in a few seconds Clarissa had surmounted every obstacle, torn her frock, and generally dishevelled her toilet, of course; but she was securely perched in a charming little nook, completely curtained by green leaves, and safe from human observation. She could just see the blue sky above the gently waving branches, and just catch a glimpse of the emerald-green moss below, on which the slanting sunbeams glinted; and she could hear the birds twittering and singing all about her. It was delightful. Clarissa had not felt so triumphant for many a day. What fun it was, running away and hiding up in the tree like a squirrel! How she wished she could build a nest, and live there with the birds as long as ever she chose! And she would run away again and again, till the horrid "governess-thing" took her departure. Once she heard Fancy calling her, and she was half-inclined to answer, but on second thoughts she decided not to betray herself; she laughed and sang a little low song as she caught a glimpse of her maid leaving the wood, convinced that it did not shelter her whom she sought.

It was all very delightful for an hour or more, and then

she began to get very hungry. Clarissa, though so sallow and meagre, had a very healthy appetite of her own, and it was considerably past her usual tea-time. Also her limbs were getting cramped, and though she shifted her position from time to time, her legs ached, and she had a creeping pain in her back, while her hands were stiffened by holding on to the friendly boughs. There was a convenient fork a little higher up, where she might repose herself in ease and safety; and thither she mounted, to find, however, that matters were not greatly mended, for though her hands were at liberty, she had to sit, or rather crouch, with her knees almost touching her chin. The situation grew more and more disagreeable, and she could not help picturing to herself the new milk, and fruit, and nice bread-and-butter, on which she was wont to regale herself about half-past five! What time was it now?

The sun was dropping behind the fir-wood on the hill, the birds were sinking to repose, for only now and then a short sweet snatch of evensong broke the silence of the fast-fading twilight. Very soon it would be quite dark, and suppose she had to stay there till the morning! She did not care for the darkness, she was not in the least afraid of being alone; but she could have cried for the want of something to eat, and she was very tired, and would have been right glad of the little white bed at home, which seemed to her at the moment such a comfortable, cosy nest.

Still, she was not going to give in just yet. If they were very much frightened, they would surely come and look for her and entreat her to return, and the governess would understand that she was going to have her own way and do exactly as she liked; she would find out that she—Lady Clarissa Oakleigh—was not one of those little girls who were to be reduced to submission for fear of consequences. But suppose no one did come? Well, it would be grand fun to sleep out of doors for once, only she must get down from the tree. She had her shawl; she would find a bed of dry moss—there were lots all about—and she would wrap her cashmere round her and lie down quite happily till the morning! Only, if she *could* but get a slice of cake and a drink of milk first! She had not thought it possible

to be so miserably hungry ; and she began to wonder how long it took to starve people to death !

Descending from her leafy eyrie was no easy performance ; she was so stiff she could scarcely stir, and in the darkness she had to feel every inch of her way towards *terra firma*. She was down at last, however, with her white frock hanging in rags about her, and several deep scratches on her arms and legs. She could not see the moss carpet which she sought, so she groped with her hands to find it, and got stung with nettles for her pains. At last she found a spot that seemed both dry and soft, and there was a gnarled root that would serve capitally for a pillow. She looked up, and the stars were shining, and that made her think of her prayers, which she said hastily, as a sort of charm she dared not neglect ; and then she cuddled herself up in her mother's old shawl, poor little rebel, and was soon as fast asleep as if she had been in her own pretty cot, under her lordly father's ancestral roof.

Poor little Clarissa ! though she pattered through "Our Father" glibly enough, she had no idea of the good God who at that moment watched over her as she lay there with only the wild creatures of the wood for her companions. There was a God—so she had been told—but she did not like to think of Him ; for was He not going to burn her for ever and for ever, if she did certain things which she could not help doing now and then ? No one had ever talked to her of the "gentle Jesus" of the children, and the sweet word "Father" had no meaning for her. No more desolate child lay down to rest that night than the high-born, high-spirited Lady Clarissa Oakleigh.

But by this time Mrs. Sweetapple and nurse were at their wits' end, and the under-servants shook their heads when the lake in the park was mentioned, and talked of getting out the *drags* as soon as morning broke. Fancy was in tears ; her little mistress had never played such a prank as this. How she blamed herself that she had not hindered the escapade ; for Clarissa had told her that she meant to hide when the nasty governess came, and give them all a good fright ; but she had not entered into par-

ticulars. Indeed, Fancy had replied, "Then don't tell me where you hide, my lady; for I shall be sure to be questioned, and I should not like to peach, nor to tell lies neither." And now Fancy would have given a year's wages for the chance of peaching; it was so dreadful to think of that child wandering alone in the darkness like a stray gipsy, hungry and cold, and running all sorts of risks. And suppose she had got down to the lake, and missed her footing for once! She was so wild and venturesome, and was so fond of dangerous places; and there was a proverb about the pitcher going to the well once too often. Fancy was nearly beside herself, when Tartar, comprehending that something was amiss, came up whining and sniffing about, as if looking for what was lost; and then it suddenly occurred to her that the dog, if he could only be made to understand what was wanted of him, would be sure to hunt the little truant, and find her speedily, alive or dead.

Tartar was a huge beast of a peculiar breed; he was very fierce, and, at the same time, very docile. He was gentle always with Clarissa, to whom he was devotedly attached, and whom he invariably obeyed; and he knew so well what was said to him, and what was going on about him, that it was difficult to believe him unendowed with actual reason. A few words, and the sight of the child's cloak and hat, made him prick up his ears and *listen*—so Fancy said—"just like a Christian!" For a minute or more he seemed to ponder the situation, and then, with a few short, low barks, he set off at a swinging trot, with his nose well to earth, taking the paths Clarissa had trodden some hours before. Nurse, and Fancy, and all the stable-boys and garden-boys and other boys employed about the Castle, followed.

Clarissa was dreaming that the governess was gone, and that she was at home with a cup of milk and a pile of bread-and-butter before her, when she awoke to find a cold nose and a rough face pressed against her own. Most children so roused would have screamed with terror; but Clarissa, though she could not at first think where she was, nor why she felt so stiff and chilly, and altogether queer, was by no means dismayed. As soon as she was

fully awake, she recognised the presence of her four-footed friend, who, after a lick or two, held up his great head and began to bark, as a signal that he had found his game. And directly afterwards a light flashed through the branches, and she heard the voice of one of the servants.

"Here's Tartar! and here be my lady! This way, Miss Fancy." And looking up, Clarissa saw the honest face of her faithful ally, the under-gardener's boy, peering at her between the tall, plume-like fronds of fern, and, presently, quite a constellation of lanterns appeared in her immediate neighbourhood. "Oh, my lady, my lady!" sobbed Fancy, as she gathered up the unresisting little form, "how could you go and frighten us right out of our very senses? Oh, you bad, naughty child! You good-for-nothing little wicked creature! If ever a young lady deserved a good whipping, and bread and water in a dark closet for a week, *you do!* There now! And you'll catch it, you'll see, and serve you right! I sha'n't pity you if you are punished till next Christmas twelvemonth." And then Fancy kissed and hugged her light burden, her words and her caresses being singularly at variance. As she said afterwards, she could have eaten her up for very joy and thankfulness; but she thought it her duty to give her such a scolding as she had never had before—from her confidential maid, at least. Mrs. Sweetapple scolded, too, though more moderately. As for poor nurse, she was only too happy to feel her child in her arms again under any circumstances, and she could not find it in her heart to utter one word of reprimand.

Clarissa had had a bath and her supper, and a little white wine negus, and she was still sitting on her nurse's lap, when she was aware of an awful presence, dark, tall, and straight, approaching her. Instinctively she knew that this was her enemy from whom she had fled, and she roused up and folded her little dressing-gown more closely about her, and prepared herself for battle. Miss Rigby, however, declined the contest; she only said in a hard, cold, steely voice, that Fancy declared must have been "made of iron-filings"—"Lady Clarissa, I have no words in which to express my displeasure at your outrageous and abominable behaviour! Wearied with my journey, I

ought to have retired some time ago. For to-night I am silent; *to-morrow* I shall punish you as severely as you deserve."

"Laws, miss," said nurse, angrily, "she's been punished enough already. Look at her poor hands and arms, all scratches and blisters! It was only a child's trick, and she did not like the notion of a strange person being put over her. There, never mind, my lambkin; I'll carry you to your bed."

"You foolish old woman!" was all that Miss Rigby deigned to answer, as she glanced contemptuously at Nurse Barlow, and left the room. During this short colloquy, Clarissa sat up with grave, composed air, and undauntedly confronted "the horrid governess-thing."

"She's worse than I thought she would be," she observed, as soon as she and nurse were left alone. "She is very ugly, isn't she? And she's ugly *inside*, I know."

By which remark Clarissa intended to convey her conviction that Miss Rigby's mind and countenance corresponded.

"I never was called a 'foolish old woman' in my life before," said nurse with an indignant sniff. "Who's *she*, I should like to know, taking upon herself to find fault with me, that have been in my lord's service going on for eight years? No, no; keep your own place, Miss Governess, and I'll keep mine! Not but what you've been a very naughty child, Lady Clarissa, and I shall have to make you promise that you'll never do such a dreadful thing again. I must rub some opodeldoc into your arms and legs to-morrow, and that will make them smart. And I dare say you've taken your death with cold. To think, now, of your lying down on the damp ground, and creeping things getting all over you! Suppose an earwig had got into your ear, it would have killed you, or made you stone deaf all your days. And that beautiful clear muslin just routed to bits, and the worked flounce that is all ribbons of rags, a piece of your dear blessed own ma's own gown! Oh, my Lady Clarissa! my dear lambkin! you didn't ought to have gone and done it!"

And the lambkin replied, "Very well, nurse, I don't think I shall want to do it again—at least, I think so now,

but I am not sure, and I can't promise. Let me go to bed; I do ache so, and I am sleepy. And I hope Tartar has had a nice supper. And did you give my kitty her milk at tea-time? And, nurse, I do wonder what she will do to punish me, to-morrow morning!"

CHAPTER VIII.

IN DURANCE VILE.

"Come when you are called. Shut the door after you. Speak when you are spoken to. Do as you are bid."—*Adage of the 18th Century.*

For several days, however, the threatened punishment had to be suspended; the child was really poorly, and nurse took care to keep her jealously secluded in her own especial quarters, which Miss Rigby happily did not choose to invade. But Clarissa, though so puny, was thoroughly healthy, and she soon threw off the cold which her repose under the greenwood-tree had engendered. She bore the application of the opodeldoc with unshrinking fortitude, and she swallowed, without hesitation, a horrible potion of warm salts-and-senna which nurse thought proper to administer. For those were the happy days when maladies of every kind, from fevers and small-pox down to that mysterious disorder styled "the vapours," were treated with strong aperients and violent emetics!

Nurse would fain have prolonged the period of indisposition; but Clarissa, as soon as the aching of her limbs and the general feverishness had subsided, craved her liberty. On the fourth morning she proclaimed herself quite well, and desired Fancy to dress her, and accompany her into the kitchen-garden, and bring a basket for some of her own peas and beans, which must be ready to be gathered. Nothing loth, Fancy prepared to obey, and mistress and maid were on the point of leaving the house,

when a summons came from the schoolroom—"Miss Rigby orders Lady Clarissa into her presence immediately."

"I won't go; tell her so!" replied Clarissa, stontly.

But Fancy interposed: "You had better go, my lady! It's no mortal use carrying on like this; she is come here to be your governess, and you will have to mind what she says, and do as you are bid."

"I don't know about that, Fancy; but I suppose I may as well have it out with her, and have done with it. The peas and beans must wait. I am not afraid of her, you know; not a bit afraid."

And throwing down her trowel and garden hat, Lady Clarissa walked boldly to the dread tribunal. Miss Rigby had evidently not expected such prompt obedience, for her pupil discovered her indulging in a most undignified yawn. It was something to perceive that she could relax those iron muscles, and incline herself from the rigid perpendicular. The governess, however, quickly drew herself into position, and looking over her nose, as was her habit when she wished to assume a commanding aspect, said sharply, "Come here, Clarissa!"

The pupil came, and, unbidden, took a seat—not the "educational chair"—and gravely faced her judge. At the same moment, Tartar walked in, and lay down at his little mistress's feet. Now during the days of Clarissa's seclusion, Miss Rigby had made the acquaintance of this animal, and the animal had made acquaintance with Miss Rigby, and drawn his own conclusions. He had not been in her vicinity many minutes before he expressed his unfavourable convictions in deep, low growls, and a terrific display of his dreadful fangs. There are people who have the sixth sense and people who have it not, and the latter laugh incredulously at the former whenever they advance their pretensions; but, for all that, the faculty, which is sometimes quite as much of a curse as a blessing, *does* exist, and that irrespective of age, or sex, or vice, or virtue, or condition. And what is very curious, it is largely shared by the inferior animals; and there are some brute creatures, dogs especially, who seem intuitively to discern the mere presence of true nobility and of base-

ness and cowardice. Tartar, who, though not of pure breed, was descended from a splendid wolf-hound—and some people affirmed there was a cross of the blood-hound in him—was largely endowed with what may be called perception of character. Anyhow, he took at first sight—or, perhaps, at first *scent*—the strongest and most invincible likes and dislikes to different persons with whom he was confronted. Nobody cared to be the object of Tartar's aversion, and, to do the dog justice, he was not capricious; he hated and testified against certain folk, he tolerated others, but objected to familiarities; and others, again, he elected to serve, obey, and defend, if needful, to the death. He was a great favourite with the Earl, whom he treated simply with common respect; he was very much attached to Fancy; but it is scarcely too much to say that he literally worshipped the child Clarissa, whom he had evidently chosen to be his liege-lady and his queen.

Miss Rigby did not like great dogs; she had a constitutional dislike to them, though she was rather fond of French poodles. On the morning after her arrival, Tartar had stalked into the room where she was seated, had sniffed in a most contemptuous way, but had made no sign till she cried, in her usual imperious tone, "Get out, you nasty brute!" And then he had growled—and Tartar's growls were not pleasant to hear; they were like mutterings of distant thunder. And then he had steadfastly contemplated her at about a yard's distance, while she sat as if rooted to the spot, had shown his enormous fangs, growled again more ominously than before, and then, turning tail, had retired as majestically as he entered.

So now, instead of addressing her recalcitrant pupil, Miss Rigby found herself constrained to remark, in a very nervous tone, "I can't have that dog here!" Clarissa made no reply, but she never took her eyes off her governess. "Are you deaf, child?" was the next inquiry. "I tell you that dog is not to enter this room."

"Very well."

"Then send him out."

"I never send Tartar out of the room; he is with me nearly always."

"Go out, sirrah!" And Miss Rigby made a threatening gesture. But Tartar never stirred; he lay still with his big head between his awful fore-paws, and growled.

Clarissa interposed: "It is of no use *you* telling him to go out when I am here. And if I told him to stay—and I do!—he would be killed before he would move—wouldn't you, Tartar?"

Tartar wagged his heavy tail, and made sundry thuds upon the floor, and pressed closer to his mistress. It was very plain that he quite understood what she was saying.

"But," continued Clarissa, "he will only growl a little to show that he is not friends with you; he will not touch you if you leave him alone,—*and me, too,*" she added, emphatically.

"I shall order him to be chained up."

"It would be no use if you did," quoth Clarissa, gravely shaking her head, and looking inexpressibly old and quaint. "Not one of the servants would dare to touch him; besides, papa says he is to go loose always. No one *could* chain him up but me."

It sounded queer enough—so queer as to be almost uncanny to Miss Rigby's thinking. That mite of a child, with her baby hands, and her fragile frame, chain up that great savage beast that would be a match for the strongest man unarmed! It was another version of Una and her lion, only Miss Rigby could not perceive it. She began to see that for the present, at least, the dog had better be left, so she at once plunged into the attack which had been adjourned so long.

"But," she commenced, "I did not send for you, Clarissa, to talk about the dog. I have something of more importance to say to you. I told you the other night that I should punish you for running away."

"I know you did, Rigby."

"You are to call me *Miss* Rigby, or 'ma'am.'" No answer. "Do you hear, Clarissa?"

"Yes, Rigby; and you are to call me *Lady* Clarissa, or 'my lady.'"

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"It does not matter."

"But I shall punish you, and severely, too."

“What will you do?”

The child's cool manner, and the amused expression of her countenance, exasperated Miss Rigby most cruelly. She was on the point of rising to box the ears of her contumacious pupil, but luckily she remembered Tartar—or rather, as if divining her amiable intention, he reminded her that he was on guard by a long, low growl, that seemed to say, “Touch my little lady if you dare.” It came so naturally to her to box the ears of naughty children, that the wonder was she did not do it on the impulse of the moment. It was well for her, however, that she did not. There was no knowing to what lengths Tartar might have gone had he once been really roused.

“I should like to give you a good whipping,” she foolishly replied.

“Ah, but that wouldn't do,” answered Clarissa, with as thoroughly an unconcerned air as if she had been discussing the plans of a doll's house; “would it, Tartar?”

A longer and louder growl than before, and several impatient thuds with that heavy tail, a queer, sinister look, too, in the animal's fiery, red-brown eyes, and a movement of the mouth very like a grin.

“As we are only just commencing our career together,” continued Miss Rigby, “and as I will give you the credit for being sorry and ashamed, I shall not go so far, this time, as to inflict the chastisement you so richly deserve. I shall so far condone your fault as to remit the personal penalty.”

“You mean you won't beat me?” said Clarissa, quietly. “But what will you do?”

“I shall sentence you to solitary confinement for the rest of the day.”

“In the dark?”

“Yes; in the dark, if you answer in that tone.”

“I don't mind whether it is dark or light; I like being in the dark; I can always go to sleep if I choose, or I can keep awake, and tell myself stories. Shall I go up now into one of the lumber-rooms? There are three dark ones at the top of the house. One is quite dark; when the door is shut you cannot see your hand, if you hold it up. I am very fond of that room. Or, if you like, there is

the ghost-room. I think I will go there, Rigby, and then I shall not be disturbed, because no one ever goes into it. You see, the ghosts know me, and I know them; but the servants are afraid."

"What nonsense you are talking. Lady Clarissa, there are no such things as ghosts!"

"Are there not? That's what Sweetapple says; but, for all that, she would not go near the ghost-quarter, after dark, for the world. If you stay here long enough, perhaps you won't say there are no such things as ghosts any more!"

"Lady Clarissa, I must protest! Ah! it is full time you were looked after; you have been left to servants and their vulgar chatter, till you are as foolish as they. Now, I forbid you ever again to speak of ghosts. I assure you there are no such things."

"Very well, I don't want to talk about them; I can talk to them when I like. Now, then! have you done with me? Tartar and I want to go out."

"You will not go out to-day. Lady Clarissa, what do you suppose I am here for?"

"I have not any idea! I don't want you. Nurse and Fancy wait upon me very well, and Sweetapple sees to my dinners. And Tom and Colin help me with my garden, and then there's Tartar—I really don't see what you can do for me."

"Lady Clarissa, you provoke me beyond all bounds. Wait upon you, indeed! Do you take me for a menial?"

"I don't know what a menial is."

"Then it is well that you should learn, and I am going to teach you. The noble Earl, your father, has engaged me for that purpose. I am *your governess*."

"What do governesses do?"

"Teach little girls all sorts of things, and make them behave themselves as young ladies should. I believe you are a very ignorant little girl, as ignorant as the poor children in the street. They tell me you cannot read, that you do not even know the alphabet? Is that true?"

"Do you mean the A B C? I know all the big letters, I think, but I don't know the little ones. I never can tell which is b, and which is d. It was very stupid to make

them so much alike, and p and q are just as bad. If I had to make an A B C, I would do it very much better."

"I think you are a very conceited child, and a very foolish one. Do you not wish to learn to read?"

"Not yet; Fancy reads to me whenever I want any reading. And I can make stories myself, and tell them to Fancy, and that is much better than reading them in a book. Of course, I shall learn to read when I grow up, or perhaps before; but I do not mean to learn anything except cricket, just yet."

"Indeed, you will begin to learn several things immediately. Give me your spelling-book."

"I have not one. I have a box of ivory letters; will that do?"

"No; boxes of letters are for babies. You must learn out of a book. I will get you a spelling-book and a copy-book at once; you must learn to write."

"Well, I think I should like to learn to write, though it cannot be as nice as drawing pictures."

"All in good time; you shall learn to draw, but reading, and writing, and arithmetic come first and foremost."

"Oh! but I *can* draw; I make pictures of everything. I'll show you if you like; I keep the best of them always, though some I give away. There is Tartar, of course; I've done him standing up and lying down; but I could not do him *running*—at least, not well. And there are my rabbits, the old black buck eating lettuces, and the doe with the long lop ears, and her little ones. The spotted cow and the calf I have promised to nurse. If you are not tiresome, I may perhaps do something for you; but it will depend upon how you behave. And now I am going—come, Tartar!"

"But you are not going, Lady Clarissa! First of all, you must have your proper lessons, and then I sentence you to spend the rest of the day quite alone, as a punishment for your bad conduct in running away and hiding yourself, and for your sauciness in answering me so rudely. I never was so addressed by a pupil in all my life! No little girl—and I have taught many—ever spoke to me as you have spoken this morning."

"They must have been very stupid little girls. But I

don't mind if I do have lessons just now; it will amuse me, for I see it has begun to rain, and the clouds look as if they would go on all day. I'm ready. You may teach me something if you like. What do you know?"

Miss Rigby clasped her hands in despair, and heartily wished she had never made her *débüt* as Lady Clarissa's governess. It was "an *awful* child" she had to deal with, she assured her friends when she wrote to them—a child who was not afraid of the dark, and who pretended to be on intimate terms with the family ghosts; who kept at her side a huge savage dog like a wolf; who treated her as a servant, and actually reversed their mutual positions and asked her, *what she knew!*

It seemed useless to go on with this extraordinary and undignified battle, in which she could not help feeling half-beaten, and she did not dare to give the child her deserts—that is to say, a good whipping to bring her under, and break her stubborn spirit without more ado. She was quite thankful when Clarissa herself proposed to be amused with "lessons," and if she had had the smallest tact, the least qualification for the difficult task she had undertaken, she would have seized the hint and acted upon it forthwith. A really sensible, high-principled, kind-hearted woman might have done anything she pleased with Clarissa, who, with the right sort of leader, would have followed docilely, for she was wonderfully clever, though so quaint, as isolated children often are; and she had a funny little conscience of her own, and an intuitive appreciation of "*noblesse obligé*." Also she was generous and affectionate, and might so easily have been won. But Miss Rigby was not sensible; she was decidedly unprincipled, and if there had ever been any milk of human kindness in her composition, it had long ago curdled and turned sour. The idea of loving or of being loved by her pupils never entered her mind; her sole theory of tuition was to command absolutely, and to require, or rather to compel, obedience the most implicit. What she might have been in her youth, I cannot say; but now, after years of experience, she had succeeded in qualifying herself, not for the truly honourable post of governess, but for that of schoolroom tyrant. And tyranny had so long been her

métier and her *forte*, under the guise of rigid discipline, that it had come to be a second nature, and she would as soon have thought of treating Tartar as a gentleman, as of showing courtesy to the child committed to her rule and guidance.

Miss Rigby was the worst person who could have been chosen to deal with a clever, spirited, utterly untrained and undisciplined child like Clarissa. She was essentially the wrong woman in the wrong place, as nurse and Fancy decided on the evening of her arrival, and as Mrs. Sweet-apple herself more than suspected before the governess had been quite a week an inmate of the Castle. She rose now, feeling painfully uncertain whether Tartar might not think proper to resent the movement, and sought among the books on the shelves till she found an ancient calf-bound spelling-book, very badly printed, on very dingy paper. Whether it was "Mavor's," or not, I cannot tell, but it was that celebrated spelling-book, so lauded in its day, and so often quoted even now, which contains the highly moral story of Smith, Brown, Jones, and Robinson, who played truant, and went out to bathe in the river on a fine summer morning—one of the number being promptly drowned, and the rest well thrashed by the schoolmaster for their disobedience, or perhaps for not being drowned with their unfortunate comrade. Also the instructive and solemn history of "*Don't Care*," and the evil end to which he inevitably came. But here my memory is at fault, for it seems to me that one "*Don't Care*" was killed by a mad bull as a judgment on him for his wicked *insouciance*; that was the version, you know, which Mrs. Pipchin, of Brighton, taught to little Paul Dombey, who considerably posed the old lady by his questions on the subject of the bull's lunacy. While there is yet another and more ancient reading, which makes "*Don't Care*" a wanderer on the face of the earth, or the sea rather; shipwrecks him, of course, casts him on a desert island, and makes him finally the prey of a ferocious lion. Such was the mild and pleasant literature by which, in days of yore, the tender thought was reared, and the young idea taught to shoot!

Now, Clarissa was greatly charmed with the hideous

wood-cuts in this most delightful volume, and when she had submitted with tolerably good grace to an examination in the alphabet, and had actually committed to memory, without any apparent effort, *b-a—ba*, *b-e—be*, *b-i—bi*, *b-o—bo*, &c., she said, calmly, “Now, if I am to go into punishment, as you call it, I may as well go at once, and I’ll take this book with me; I can make out a beautiful story all about those naked boys by the river. How long am I to stop, and what room shall we stop in?”

“We! I am not intending to put myself in disgrace. I am not going to be shut up with you.”

“I hope not; I should not like that. No, I meant Tartar; he will come with me.”

“That I cannot allow. You must remain alone.”

“Tartar,” said Clarissa to her wide-awake dragon, “come with me; I want you.”

“He is not to come,” interposed Miss Rigby, getting very angry.

“But he *will* come, and you cannot hinder him. Why, if he were shut out he would tear the door down, and he would half eat you up, if I were to set him at you—and just one word would do it, because he knows all I say; don’t you, Tartar?”

Tartar rolled his eyes at Miss Rigby, and growled. Then he got up, shook himself, and stood close to his little lady. There was nothing for it but to give in; for discretion was, undoubtedly, the better part of valour in this case. Tartar was clearly not a dog to be trifled with, and he had espoused the cause of Lady Clarissa as his own. They both went together to a certain dreary-looking apartment not far from the schoolroom, and Miss Rigby locked them both in, first saying, with her head between the door and the door-post, “You will remain there till bed-time, you naughty child! and at one o’clock I shall send you a piece of dry bread for your dinner, and at five another piece, and a cup of milk and water.”

“Tartar must have his dinner properly.”

“Then he must go and take it in the right place; if he likes to starve, he can,” returned Miss Rigby, delighted to think she could punish the child through the dog; for she had an uncomfortable suspicion that Clarissa would not

care much about short-commons and frugal fare, nor object to the confinement, as it was now raining heavily and hopelessly. Nurse had given her to understand that she often spent hours alone with her dog from choice.

Clarissa only laughed, and replied that Tartar would not like to starve, but it did not matter. And then she was left alone. Punctually at one a lump of bread and a glass of water were handed in to her by Miss Rigby herself, and at five that lady again appeared with a second relay of refreshments, which were strictly *en carte du jour*. Clarissa was fast asleep on the hearthrug, with one arm round her four-footed friend, and her sallow little face pressed to his huge head. Miss Rigby shuddered; but there was something else that astonished her so much that she forgot for the moment her dread of the great dog. Close at hand lay a half-gnawed bone; and on the table were crumbs of cake, the empty claw of a fine lobster, and two or three well-picked chicken bones; about half the bread had disappeared.

"What is the meaning of this, Lady Clarissa?" she asked sternly, as the child awoke, and rubbed her eyes. "Ah, I see! one of the servants has obtained access to you; but that will not happen again, and I shall complain to my lord. Was it Fancy?"

"What was Fancy?" said Clarissa, still only half awake; she had been sound asleep for at least three hours.

"Was it Fancy who transgressed my orders by bringing you delicacies for your dinner, when I had sentenced you to dry bread?"

"Fancy? Oh dear no! How could she get in? You kept the key of the door, didn't you?"

"Certainly. But how came these crumbs and bits to be here? And the dog has had a beef-bone."

"Of course. Why, you didn't think I was so silly as to keep Tartar without his dinner and go without myself?"

"Silly indeed! you naughty, shameless child! How did you get the dinner?—that is the question—I will know."

"That is my secret," returned Lady Clarissa. "Tartar and I managed it between us. We always do manage

things when we are together. Fancy had nothing to do with it; none of the servants had anything to do with it."

"You are telling lies," cried Miss Rigby, getting more angry every moment—as perhaps, all things considered, was not unnatural; for no grown-up person likes to be baffled by a child. "You are telling lies, you know you are, you bad, wicked little girl!"

"It is you that are bad and wicked, trying to starve Tartar and me. I never tell lies; I am Lady Clarissa Oakleigh! Come, Tartar, we will go to the nursery; we have stayed here long enough."

CHAPTER IX.

A DOMESTIC TOURNAMENT.

"Man, proud man!
Dress'd in a little brief authority;
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence,—like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven,
As make the angels weep."

AND so from day to day the warfare was continued, Miss Rigby *versus* Lady Clarissa and Tartar, to whom nurse and Fancy, and all the servants, presently gave in their staunch adherence; the underlings of the household loudly protesting against their young lady's tyrant, and, sometimes, caballing among themselves as to the speediest means of getting quit of her. Nurse at once told Mrs. Sweetapple that Miss Rigby "wouldn't do;" she had not the right method with children; she was especially unsuited to the difficult pupil she had undertaken, and, worst of all, she was certainly *not a lady*! And the housekeeper, though admitting in her own mind the perfect justness of nurse's remarks, still felt herself bound to stand up for

her *protégée*—for as such she considered Miss Rigby, who had been engaged under her own auspices, and for whose failure or success she could not but feel that she was, to a great extent, responsible.

“Well,” she answered, crossly, “I cannot say she does get on with Lady Clarissa; but then, if there ever was a child born to torment the persons put in charge over her, it’s *she*! And she has taken to new and more provoking ways than ever since Miss Rigby came; she does not go into her wild rages now, I am told; but she quietly argues, and contradicts, and ridicules, just as if she and her governess were equals. It must be aggravating!”

“I dare say it is, and I don’t defend my lady, for a child ought to be obedient and bidable, and she shouldn’t answer again, nor be pert, nor ask too many questions. But I tell you what, Mrs. Sweetapple, the child that knocks under to Miss Rigby must be a child without a bit of spirit—one of those meek, dull, timid little creatures, that will bear any sort of ill-usage, and never rebel, nor make complaints, though I have heard how worms will turn again, if you tread too hard. I should bepity the child that was altogether in Miss Rigby’s power, that I should. As for my Lady Clarissa, she is doing her more harm than good, because she is bringing out the worst part of her nature, and continually provoking her to naughtiness. She has a nasty temper herself; and, as I said before, and I said it to myself the moment I set eyes upon her, she’s no lady.”

“She knows a lot of things, and to hear her play upon the piano is wonderful. She’s up and down the keys like lightning, and she makes more noise in five minutes than our late lady, the Countess, made in an hour! And she talks French, she tells me, and knows Italian, and logarithms, and she can dance hornpipes, and the *Minuet de la Cour*, and teaches composition and the use of the globes. If that is not being a lady, what is?”

“I can’t tell,” replied nurse, “because I am not a lady myself; but I know one when I see her, just as I know a tabby cat from a tortoiseshell. And a governess did *ought* to be a lady, sure enough; and I have known governesses that had all the manners of ladies of rank—governesses

That I would defer to in a moment. But I don't like being treated as if I was scum, I don't; my late dear lady never spoke to me as this woman does. It's my belief she comes from a country where the servants are negro slaves, and she has been one of the drivers. If she were mistress here, our own lawful countess, she could not order about her more; and never such a word as '*please*,' nor '*thank you*,' whatever's done for her. That's a bad example for a child, and Lady Clarissa had better never know the use of the 'globes' to her dying day, than learn such manners. If I were you, Mrs. Sweetapple, I should just let Miss Rigby understand that she is to behave herself decently, and I should make her know that she is going quite the wrong way with our young lady."

"Well, if opportunity occurs, I shall speak, perhaps, but I am not sure how she will take it. She thinks herself mightily above *me*; though I dare say my people are as respectable as hers. Still, I do say that Lady Clarissa is an awful handful; and Miss Rigby has taught no end of young ladies; and the character she brought with her—she does not call it that, though; '*testimonials*,' I think she says—all written in beautiful fine writing on vellum, and blue, and gold, and red all round the borders, full of her praises, and saying how she is the best of disciplinarians."

The housekeeper had not to wait long for her opportunity; the very next day came Fancy to the still-room, where she was engaged, with a message from the governess. "Please, ma'am, Miss Rigby wants to see you."

"She must wait a little, Fancy; I must tie up these jars. Is she in my room?"

"No, ma'am, in the schoolroom. I think, ma'am, she seems to expect you will come to her."

"Go and tell her, Fancy, that I am very busy just now, but that I will see her in half-an-hour in my own sitting-room. She will find me there."

Fancy went with her message, and soon returned.

"She says, ma'am, that she will see you in the schoolroom; she is accustomed to be waited upon, not to come and go at—at—*other peoples'* beck and call." The truth being that Miss Rigby had spoken of the housekeeper as a

"servant;" and Fancy had the discretion not to repeat the epithet which was so sure to be offensive, although she had herself replied to Miss Rigby: "Mrs. Sweetapple is my lord's servant, of course, just as you are; but she is mistress in this house, and we all treat her as such." For which speech she was rewarded by a summary dismissal as "a bold-faced, impudent young hussey!"

"Well! I am sure," said the indignant housekeeper, writing "apricots" on the cover of a jar of preserved damsons. "What next, I wonder! And I engaged her, and it's me that will pay her her wages when they are due. But as I brought her here, I can send her away again, I suppose. My lord knows no more of her than if she came from the moon; he left it quite to me. And I was assured she was so suitable, such a good one for bringing troublesome children under, and so clever and accomplished, and so anxious to be employed in a nobleman's family, and to speak of her pupil as 'my lady.' And this is the way she behaves to me! I'll let her see. No! I have no further message, Fancy; go you, and look after your young lady, and don't let her go and dig in the gravel-pit if you can help it. She had three pairs of clean stockings on yesterday, nurse says."

And Mrs. Sweetapple sat cogitating and nursing her displeasure for a good hour after Fancy had gone away. She was so "put about," as she said afterwards, that she really did not know greengage from gooseberry, nor marmalade from conserve of roses, and all her work was to do over again next day. A little while after, as she was crossing the hall, she encountered Miss Rigby buckling on her clogs, for it was dirty out of doors, and goloshes at that period were very rarely, if ever, seen. She was still struggling with a refractory strap, when, looking up, she perceived the housekeeper, and addressed her—"I sent for you, Sweetapple, more than an hour ago; I suppose that saucy minx, Fancy, never delivered her message? She must have her discharge immediately; you had better give her warning to-day—or I will, as her offence was against myself."

"Miss Rigby," replied Mrs. Sweetapple with a good deal of quiet dignity, "no one engages or dismisses ser-

vants in this house but myself. And Fancy *did* carry her message! Except in cases of illness, I am not in the habit of attending to summonses from any person but my lord himself. What have you to say to me?"

"That I really must give that tiresome child a good, sound whipping, and therefore I desire you to chain up that great dog; he is positively dangerous about the house."

"Miss Rigby, are you mad?"

"Mad, indeed! Speak respectfully, woman! Do you know who I am?"

"My lord's governess, I suppose, whom I engaged in obedience to his commands."

"Then, as the governess, I claim to be treated with proper deference and respect."

"Proper respect you shall have while you are at Orwell, Miss Rigby, and proper respect you have had, I think, ever since you came—except perhaps from my Lady Clarissa, and that is very much your own fault, for you don't behave in a way to command the child's respect. Of course, a governess is a person to whom respect is due, but there are different sorts of governesses, I take it, just as there are different sorts of kitchen-maids and cooks—ay, and different sorts of prime-ministers, and kings, and queens, if you come to that—and I am afraid, Miss Rigby, you are of the sort that neither servants nor children will look up to."

"I am not going to argue with you, Sweetapple——"

"Mrs. Sweetapple, if you please, Miss Rigby! That is my style and title at Orwell. It is not good manners to address me in that way, let me tell you. As to your whipping Lady Clarissa, I forbid you to lay your hands upon her. She has never had a blow or a slap in her life, and do you think she would bear it? If you cannot manage her, you had better give it up at once, and I think it will be better for all parties that we separate; shall we say this day month, and all travelling expenses paid?"

"I do not understand you, *Mistress* Sweetapple!"

"I think you do, Miss Rigby. You must have had warning or notice before this. You have scarcely, I should

imagine, discharged yourself from all the situations you have held."

"Do you mean that *you* give me notice?"

"Of course, I do. I engaged you, and I dismiss you. I am the only authority at present at Orwell. I have not even told my lord that you are arrived. He leaves the entire management, and, of course, the responsibility, in my hands."

"I shall not accept your notice, and I shall write immediately to your master, and my employer, the Earl of Orwell; and I shall give Lady Clarissa the beating she deserves, if I think proper, and I shall issue orders that Tartar be chained up."

"You may give such orders, but no one will obey them. If Tartar is to be chained, you must do it yourself, and I fancy you will scarcely make the attempt. Not one of the men on the ground would dare to touch him. And unless you give me your solemn promise to keep your hands off Lady Clarissa, I shall withdraw her from your society, and request you to leave the Castle to-day."

"I never met with such insolence! Woman! your assurance is only surpassed by your ignorance. Give your menial servants notice, if you choose, but do not presume to interfere with my province."

"*Woman*, indeed!" cried the indignant Mrs. Sweetapple. "*Woman* yourself, if you please! We are not used to vulgar expressions here. Woman or not, you are no lady; and once more, I give you notice—proper legal notice of a month—a calendar month from this day, at which date, if you do not leave peaceably, you will be forced to go."

And Mrs. Sweetapple walked away, feeling that she could not trust herself a minute longer, lest she should "forget herself and say what had better be left unsaid." And before curfew rang that evening, as it always did from the old church tower, every man and woman, and girl and boy, in and about the Castle knew that the governess had received her dismissal. And everybody said it was no more than was to be expected. But Miss Rigby was as good as her word; she spent the whole afternoon in writing a long and

elaborate epistle to the Earl of Orwell, dilating upon her wrongs, upon the gross insults she had received, upon the iniquities of Mrs. Sweetapple and Fancy, and upon the vicious propensities of her pupil, whom she stigmatised as the wickedest, worst child she had ever had to deal with! Which letter proved Miss Rigby to be a very foolish and ignorant woman, since there is not one parent in a thousand, however neglectful and unkind himself, who will bear abuse of his offspring from another. If she wished to find favour in the eyes of Lord Orwell, and to enlist his sympathies on her own side, she took the very worst way she could have taken in order to secure her ends.

The Earl in due season received the precious document, which was addressed to him at his club, and he read and even re-read it, with a good deal of amazement. "What an insufferable person!" was my lord's cogitation, when he had made himself fully acquainted with the contents of the long, rambling, scratchily-written epistle. "This comes of leaving things to your housekeeper! Sweetapple must have been crazy when she engaged this woman for my daughter's governess—a vulgar upstart, about as fit for a governess as I for an archbishop. I must speak to Mrs. Shrosbery. After all, it is the very best thing I can do—to get married again. Though, if I had not wanted the money, I might have sent Clarissa to a good school."

For in those days, young ladies of rank were occasionally educated in very expensive and high-class boarding-schools.

For the first time the Earl felt some satisfaction in his engagement, as unconnected with his pecuniary difficulties. It was only in the fitness of things that he should consult his future Countess, and accordingly he carried to her the letter he had received. Mrs. Shrosbery—it was full three months before that freezing wedding in St. James', Piccadilly—gave the epistle her very best attention, and at once decided against the governess.

"A very unfit person to be entrusted with the care of children, I should say, and the sooner you dismiss her the better," was her dictum, when the Earl requested her

opinion. "What names she calls the dear little angel! And to talk of *whipping* her! No wonder the child hates her. Did you engage her without references, my lord?"

"I did not engage her at all. Sweetapple said the child must have a governess, for she was so utterly wild and unmanageable she could do nothing with her, and old nurse spoiled her; and, really, it was time she learnt something, and left off climbing trees, and taking birds'-nests, and feeding calves."

"Oh, dear! my lord; quite a little tom-boy."

"Yes, quite. And though she is small of stature, she is old for her age, if you know what I mean; she is very sharp and, in a certain manner, cunning; for if she cannot get her own way openly, she will plot and scheme for it—or so I am told. Well, I felt that it was not quite the thing to leave her entirely to servants, though nurse is most trustworthy, and Mrs. Sweetapple a really superior person; and so I said I supposed the child must have a governess. I spoke to Aunt Lavinia about it, but she declined to interfere, and then somehow—I had so much to attend to—I quite forgot my promise, and Sweetapple wrote again, urging me to secure the services of a suitable lady as soon as possible. So I wrote back, and desired Sweetapple to take it in her own hands; she knew the child better than I did. It seems but the other day Clarissa was a baby, and I thought she—Sweetapple, I mean—might easily find what was wanted by inquiring among her friends, or by answering advertisements. And this Miss Rigby is the result."

"It was like her impudence to write to you, when she was engaged by the housekeeper. But, there! governesses generally are impudent, and what are they but servants, when all is said and done?"

The Earl winced and coloured like a girl. As his bride-elect spoke—just as ignorant, vulgar, prosperous women always do speak of other women who have to earn a living—he remembered his lot, lovely, refined Clarissa—this child's mother; a governess, indeed, but graceful, high-bred, "a thing of beauty," "a phantom of delight." And he gravely responded, "Of course, Louisa, there are governesses and governesses, and some of them, doubtless,

are impudent. But there are others, as true gentlewomen as ever walked the earth, excellent, highly-educated, accomplished ladies, whom no one could possibly stigmatise as servants, although they receive a 'stipend.'"

He was just going to say, "no one except the merest *parvenu*!" when he luckily remembered that to that class his fair Louisa undoubtedly belonged. And Louisa noted his hesitation, but attributed it to a far different cause. She fancied she had lighted upon a weak point in her future husband's character. She had a very poor opinion of the virtue of men, either married or single, and she made no doubt that the Earl had once upon a time been caught by a pretty, designing governess; the truth of the case she never once suspected. And she mentally resolved that as Countess of Orwell she would never on any account engage a governess who could lay claim to personal attractions. It was, however, decided that Miss Rigby should at once take her departure from Orwell Castle, and that Clarissa should be left to go on in the old way till her new mamma should assume the reins of government.

"And I should say the sooner she is out of the house—I mean the Castle—the better!" said Mrs. Shrosbery. "Pay her her month's wages, and let her go. What's a few pounds, more or less?"

"Nothing, of course," replied the Earl. "I will take your advice, and write to Sweetapple this evening."

"Won't you answer Miss Rigby's letter?"

"Certainly not; unless she wofully belies herself, she is just the woman with whom one should have as little to do as possible. Sweetapple engaged her, and Sweetapple must give her the sack."

"Give her the sack!" Oh, my dear lord, what a vulgar expression! But you are so funny! You are the very drollest creature!"

And the Earl, who had not the smallest idea of being funny and droll, bade his Louisa adieu, and went home to compose the document which should arm the housekeeper with the fullest authority, in respect of Miss Rigby, who had informed him that she refused to be dismissed by a *menial*—she was wonderfully fond of that word, and would never

put a coal on the schoolroom fire, because it was a venial duty ; that, in short, she would receive her *congé* only from the Earl himself.

Several days later, his lordship's letter reached its destination, and, in her anxiety to secure her own portion of the morning's correspondence, Miss Rigby invaded Mrs. Sweetapple's own sanctum, where she was closeted with nurse.

"Where are the letters?" demanded the governess. "I know there is one for me."

"There is no letter for you, Miss Rigby," replied Mrs. Sweetapple. "But I have a communication from his lordship, enclosing your own letter to him. I have just been reading it."

"What is my letter returned for, I should like to know? And what business have you to read it? It was strictly private."

"Private or not, my lord sends it back again, desiring me to peruse it, and of course I have done what he requested. I think you took a liberty, a very great liberty, indeed, Miss Rigby, and the Earl is altogether offended. I will read you what he says on the subject, for there is no time to be lost. Says my lord, 'This person's strange, intrusive, and unladylike epistle proves her to be quite unfit for the task she has undertaken. I am surprised that you, with your discrimination, decided to engage her. I think the negotiation must have been concluded without a personal interview. I shall thank you to dismiss her immediately ; pay her the full salary up to Christmas, and her travelling expenses to London, or to whatever place in England she may prefer. Only get rid of her at once. I enclose a cheque for the occasion.'

"Those are my lord's commands, Miss Rigby. I will send one of the maids to help you with your packing, but as the coach is already starting, if not started, I suppose you must remain till to-morrow. You see I made no rash boast when I told you I was mistress here, and that my lord left the household arrangements entirely in my hands. And if I may give you a bit of advice at parting. I should say, 'Don't make enemies wherever you go!' A person must be friendly if she wants friends; and it is

awkward to be without any, for there's a time for everybody to be in trouble, and I dare say you've heard about a 'friend in need,' &c."

Miss Rigby's rage and astonishment were simply indescribable, but she saw clearly that resistance was useless. She did say—though more out of bravado than with serious meaning—"What if I refuse to pack up, *Mistress Sweetapple*? What if I say I *will not go*?"

"In that case, I must send for Tomkiss the constable, show him my lord's letter, and bid him do his duty; and that duty would be very unpleasant to you, Miss Rigby."

"Don't be afraid," retorted Miss Rigby. "I would not stay now to be insulted and oppressed, not for ten thousand a-year, offered to me by the Earl himself on his bended knees."

"That is a sight you are not likely to see," replied nurse, laughing. "It is easy to refuse what never will be offered."

Next day, Miss Rigby, without taking any leave of her pupil, departed, Tartar barking loudly, yet good-humouredly, after the carriage which bore her through the park. But there was something in the Earl's letter which was not communicated to the deposed governess—something which Mrs. Sweetapple and nurse agreed to keep secret for the present, though no secrecy had been imposed upon them, and though the important news which they suppressed must necessarily become public in a very short space of time. I need scarcely say that I refer to the announcement of Lord Orwell's marriage. Once more the Earl would have a wife, the Castle a lady-mistress, and Clarissa a stepmother!

"And if the new Countess is a really good and sensible woman," said nurse, "I don't know but what it is not the best thing that could happen for my little lady. But if she isn't—if she don't take to the child, nor the child to her, heaven help us, but there will be sore trouble. And we can't get rid of *her*. Suitable or unsuitable, she'll be a fixture for life."

And Mrs. Sweetapple shook her head ominously. "I've no opinion of stepmothers," said she. "I, for one, sha'n't like seeing her in that angel's place; and I did think *my*

lord would have had the decency not to take a third wife. But there! men are never tired of matrimony, though it's a lottery with more blanks than prizes in it; and my mind misgives me that we shall be none the better for our new Countess."

CHAPTER X.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

"And the village was gay
For a holiday.

Merrily echoed the old church bells,
Peal on peal o'er the hills and dells;
Borne away on the morning breeze,
Over the moorland, over the leas;
Back again with a joyous clang!
Merrily, merrily, on they rang!"

AND so it came to pass that it was necessary once more to prepare Clarissa for certain changes which might speedily be anticipated. Miss Rigby had not been out of the house many days when workmen came down to Orwell and commenced their labours in several parts of the Castle. There was not time to make extensive alterations; but even Mrs. Sweetapple, who highly disapproved of her lord's approaching marriage, could not but own that some changes and improvements ought to take place before the bride came home. Things had not been "kept up" since the Countess Clarissa's death; all the state-rooms were closed, though duly aired and dusted at regular periods, under the housekeeper's own supervision, and the furniture, though costly and massive, was altogether out of fashion. Of course it was very soon known that the Earl was again on the point of marriage.

But no one spoke to Clarissa on the subject. Mrs. Sweetapple and nurse agreed to defer the evil hour as long as possible, Fancy could be reticent enough when she chose, and the under-servants were one and all desired to

keep silence before their little lady ; and so from day to day the child went on in blissful ignorance of the impending earthquake that was to convulse the little kingdom of which she had long constituted herself sole princess. It would have been far wiser if someone had quietly told her what was about to happen, but there was no very wise person just then at Orwell, therefore Clarissa was still unapprised when one dull day early in December the Earl himself unexpectedly appeared. And then both nurse and housekeeper felt that they had foolishly procrastinated, and been terribly remiss.

But it was too late now to mend matters ; a sudden communication might be dangerous ; besides, my lord, within half an hour of his arrival, walked into the school-room, where Clarissa, who had suddenly resolved to educate herself, was busily engaged in writing a copy which Fancy had been persuaded to set for her. That young person was also in attendance, and she was merrily chanting the unseasonable lay of "Cherry ripe," when the Earl, without being announced, opened the door, and struck her dumb with confusion and surprise. She hastily gathered up her work, and, curtseying profoundly, said : "I beg pardon, my lord, I did not know that your lordship had arrived," and, without much ceremony, made her exit.

The Earl approached his daughter, and kissed her, as she silently laid down her pen. Very, very seldom had he kissed the child, and she scarcely knew what to make of the unfamiliar caress ; she sat and mutely regarded him with dark, serious eyes, and a curious expression of wonder in her little sallow face. Tartar was more demonstrative ; he came and put his huge head on the Earl's hand, and gave one or two short barks of welcome. The prospect of a little society did not displease him.

"Well," said Lord Orwell, drawing a chair to the table, and seating himself by Clarissa, "and are you surprised to see me ?"

"Rather," she replied gravely. "What are you come for ?"

"Suppose I am come to see you ?"

"I don't think you are. I think you are come to see how the men are doing their work."

This shrewd reply amused the Earl, and he said to himself, "What a queer little animal! half a baby and half an old woman! I wonder whether Mrs. Shrosbery will take to her!" For it was a significant fact that the bridegroom-elect always thought of his betrothed as the relict of Peter Shrosbery. "Well," he returned, after a moment's pause, "I did come down partly to see how things were getting on, but I want to have a little talk with you, Clarissa. How was it that you and Miss Rigby quarrelled so soon?"

"She was *horrible!*" replied Clarissa, earnestly. "I could not bear her, and Tartar growled whenever she came into the room. And she locked us up in one of the east-wing rooms without any dinner, except a dry lump of bread; but I got out of the window, and took what I wanted from the larder, and I got in again, and she never could find out how I did it. It was great fun to see how angry she looked."

"I am afraid you were a naughty little girl. You ought not to have escaped, when you were shut up as a punishment, which I dare say you well deserved."

"But I wanted my dinner, and Tartar wanted his! We could not eat her stale bread; and it was not near enough for us both. I could have stayed quite quietly, if I had had what I liked, and what Tartar liked, and plenty of it. And I came back again; I did not try to get away—for it rained, and it was best indoors."

"What did you have for your dinner?" asked the Earl, with increased but unexpressed amusement.

"Let me see! I had some cold chicken, I remember;—the white part, for that is nicest. There was a whole chicken ready cut up on a dish, and I could reach it quite easily on the larder-steps. Then there was just one claw of a big red lobster, and I took that, and some sweet cake, and some little apples, and some beef-bones, with lots of meat on them, for Tartar. And I went into the dairy, and had a good drink of milk. But I had to come back again for Tartar's bones, for I could not carry all at once; it's rather a hard climb up to that window!"

"Upon my word, Clarissa, you are a very extraordinary

young lady! You seem to have dined superbly. Was that all?"

"Yes! except a piece of pie that I ate in the larder because it was juicy, so that I could not take it away. But I could not *quite* finish the cake, and Tartar did not care for it; he liked best to gnaw his bone. And when we had done dinner, we lay down on the hearthrug, and I told Tartar tales—tales out of my own head—till we both went to sleep."

"I do not wonder that your governess called you 'a most incorrigible child.' However, I dare say there were faults on both sides; she was not a proper person to be about you, but you must never do such a thing again; and, when you have another governess, you must make up your mind to do just as you are told."

"I don't want another governess! governesses are no good; I am teaching myself, and Fancy helps me. I can almost read now, and I shall soon write very well,—Fancy says so. Please, papa, I am not to have another governess—thing, am I?"

"I cannot say. That will be for your mamma to decide."

The child looked puzzled. "Mamma!" she replied, in a bewildered tone; "why, she is dead!—at least, she is in heaven! Everybody says she is, and I have not seen her this long time. *Can* she send me a governess from heaven?"

"How foolish you are, child! Of course, I mean your new mamma."

"My *new* mamma!"

"Yes! It is rude to repeat what I say. Have they not told you that I am bringing you a new mamma, very soon?"

"No one told me. And you need not bring her, for I don't want her, and I won't have her."

"You will be obliged to have her, Clarissa, and it is very much on your account that I have asked her to come and live here with us."

"Will she live with us always—for ever and ever? And will you be here, too?"

"I shall be here part of the time, certainly, and your

mamma, of course. Wives always live with their husbands, and mammas with their little girls."

"Will she be your wife?"

"Most certainly, and my wife will be your mamma. You seem so sharp, you ought to understand that."

"Your wife will be my mamma!" repeated Clarissa, slowly; "or—your mamma will be my wife! Which did you say?"

The Earl burst out laughing. He was really annoyed at the impracticable child's behaviour; her imperturbable coolness made him for the moment seriously angry, but there was something so utterly ludicrous in her quaint, would-be grown-up airs, and in her unsophisticated tone, that he gave way to merriment in spite of himself. "My wife will be your mamma," he reiterated. "There! now you know all about it. And I do hope, Clarissa, you mean to be a very good girl, and do exactly as you are told, and give your new mamma no trouble."

Clarissa privately resolved that she would give the "new mamma" as much trouble as possible, but she kept a grave countenance, and shut her lips. Her father thought she looked like a little owl, so stolid, so sagacious, so contemplative. The next minute he was wondering at her stupidity, for she asked quietly, "And shall I have a new papa, as well as a new mamma?"

"Don't be absurd, child!" he cried, crossly. "I am not dead, am I? Should you like a new papa, pray?"

"No, for I don't like any new things, except new dogs. I could do without any papa, I think, but I will *not* have a new mamma."

"It is of no use talking in that way," replied the Earl, in a tone of serious displeasure. "Your new mamma is coming, whether you like her or not; and if you do not behave well to her, I shall punish you severely. I shall give you a downright good *whipping*, and shut you up with dry bread for your dinner, in some place where you cannot get out of the window. It is quite time you were taken in hand, Clarissa; you have had your own will too long. Lady Orwell will soon bring you under. She is not one to be disobeyed, so you had better make up your mind at

once to behave properly. It will be the worse for you if you do not."

And then the Earl went away, leaving Clarissa to ponder the situation. When he was gone, Tartar came and laid his head in his mistress's lap, and looked wistfully at her. She began to talk to him—"We won't have her, will we, Tartar? We will have nothing to do with her, and you must frighten her like you did Miss Rigby; and if growling does not do, you must bite her, you know. A new mamma, indeed! *I know* people can't have two mammas, and the Countess was *my* mamma—perhaps, she is *my* mamma *now*, up in heaven, just the same! I wonder what she does up there, Tartar! Don't you think she must want to come down? I should, I know. It must be dreadful up in heaven! Sunday always, and church always! Great high pews, I suppose, and 'Lighten our darkness,' and somebody always saying '*Amen!*' How tired we shall be. Only that is not the worst of it! They say there are no dogs in heaven, so *you* can't go, Tartar. I am sure I wish I was a dog—I do!"

Don't be shocked at poor little Clarissa, my readers. Sunday was a wearisome day to her—a day of best frocks and no play, and sitting hours and hours, as it seemed to her, in the high Castle pew, listening to a service she could not possibly understand, or probably not listening, but very tired, and hot, and sleepy, and longing to escape into the outer world. Orwell Church was a large, ugly building, with low, flat ceiling; cattle-pens by way of pews, and the stately Castle pew—square, dusty, stuffy, and shut out from the vulgar gaze—the worst of all. Those were days—the "good old days," some people call them still—when Nonconformity was nothing and nobody, and was thankful to feast itself on humble pie; and when the National Church held its own without interference and without reproof, and held it drowsily, comfortably, stupidly, and luxuriously, and without much regard to the salvation of souls, and a good deal of regard for that which perisheth in the using; days when sermons were repeated from year to year, till the drowsy congregation knew them by heart; days when "the prayers" were droned through *anyhow*, and "the Lessons" read *very*

much as an educated parrot might read them; days when "Sabbath drawlers of old saws" hummed through "some worm-cankered homily;" days when a moribund farmer might comfort himself as he reflected—

"A knows I hallus voäted wi' Squoire, and Choorch an' Staäte.
 An' i' the woorst o' toimes, I wur niver agin the raäte,
 An' I hallus comed to's choorch afore moy Sally wur deäd,
 An' 'eered un a bummin' awaäy loike a buzzard-clock ower my
 yeäd,
 An' I never know'd whot a meäned, but I thowt a 'ad summut
 to saäy,
 An' I thowt a said whot a owt to a' said, an' I comed awaäy."

And Clarissa, poor child, with her active little body, held in bondage, and her still more active little mind, which could not be restrained, was told solemnly that "it was *always* church-time in heaven!" that, in fact, the New Jerusalem was a city where it was Sunday the whole week through, and where congregations never heard the welcome and much-longed-for "Now to God the Father," &c., which folks in this world are privileged, sooner or later, to hear.

Then it was on Sundays that Clarissa was instructed in theology, of a decidedly sulphurous character; it was on Sundays that she had the headache after sitting in the musty, fusty pew, in the mouldy, airless church, which was generally guiltless of ventilation; it was on Sundays that she and Tartar generally contrived to get into trouble. Naturally, she disliked Sunday, but she could endure it once a week. It was the prospect of perpetual, never-ending Sunday that filled her with dismay.

Presently, Fancy came back, and inquired what my lord had been talking about.

Then Clarissa burst out, "He told me, Fancy, that I should have a new mamma, and that he would whip me if I behaved badly to her!"

"Then, if I were you, I would not behave badly, my lady. I would just try how very good I could be. When she comes, we shall all have to be on our best behaviour, I can tell you."

"Cannot we get rid of her—*somehow*? Miss Rigby could not stay, you know."

"You must not so much as think of such a thing. No! Whoever goes, she will stay on always, and rule over us continually. Why, she will be our countess, your papa's wedded wife, Lady Clarissa!"

"That is what papa said. But I don't see how she is to be my mamma. Anyway, Fancy, if I can't make her go away, I can bother her and plague her, till she doesn't know where she is."

Fancy laid down the needlework which she had just taken up, and looked solemnly at Clarissa.

"My lady," she said, in a tone so grave, that the child for the moment was almost awed; "my dear little lady, you know I love you, don't you?"

"Yes, I think you do love me, Fancy, though you would not take me to see Colin bait the traps the other day, and you told Sweetie of me when I climbed up the tree, and greened my new frock all over."

"I did my duty, Lady Clarissa. Noblemen's daughters must not help to hunt vermin, nor climb up trees like tom-boys."

"I wish I were a tom-boy! I hate to be a girl."

"That is very wrong; but I am not going to talk to you just now about your naughty, rude pranks. I sometimes check and vex you, my dear, because I do love you; I don't think anybody loves you better than I do, and so I want you to be good and happy. And that brings me to what I want to say;—now, listen! as sure as you and I sit here, as sure as Monday comes next to Sunday, you will have to give in to the new countess, and it is of no use fighting against one in power. She will be too strong for you, my dear; too strong for me, for all of us, to oppose. Besides, as our lady, she ought to be obeyed and treated with respect. And perhaps she will be very fond of you, and have you with her a great deal. I should not wonder if she brought you such a beautiful doll as you never saw before, and perhaps a doll's house. Who knows? There are splendid things to be bought in London, I am told; and my lady that is to be is very rich, they say. Now do behave yourself prettily to her when she comes, there's a darling young lady. Make her your friend, and don't do anything to cause her to dislike you.

If you once begin to go against each other, there's no saying what will happen."

"I don't feel as if I *could* be good, Fancy."

"Oh, yes, you can; everybody can be good if they please; leastways, they are not obliged to be downright naughty."

"I am afraid I don't please to be good. I cannot bear to be told to do things. And when people vex me, I like to serve them out."

"Oh, my lady! my lady! You will have lots of trouble, I fear. Well, I have said *my* say, and if you will go contrary ways, and set yourself against your new mamma, I cannot help it. But you will have to pay for it! I am afraid, Lady Clarissa, you will have to go through seas of sorrow and shed oceans of salt tears, before you learn the right way to behave. And you have got plenty of sense, if you like to use it; and your sense must tell you, if you think at all about it, that a child like you must have tasks and teachers, and must do as she is bid, and, above all, ought to honour her father and her mother, as the Catechism teaches."

"Is that Catechism? I thought it was Bible. They say it in church every Sunday, and then they say, 'Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.' I think it is great nonsense to keep on saying the same thing over and over again, don't you, Fancy?"

"Lady Clarissa, you downright shock me! If Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John came down from heaven to talk to you, I do believe you would cavil at them. Do you know, I begin to be afraid you are wicked as well as naughty, and you know where wicked people go to! It is dreadful to find fault with what they say in church. I dare not do it; I should be afraid some awful judgment would come upon me." And Fancy, feeling quite cast down, resumed her sewing. She was honestly trying to influence Clarissa for good, and she knew she had spoken kindly as well as faithfully, but it was most disheartening to come to such results, and she foresaw a future of misery for her wayward little mistress the prospect of which drew tears from her eyes. Clarissa saw them fall upon her work,

and at once asked what she cried for. Was nurse cross? or had Sweetie been scolding her again?

"I am crying for you, my lady," said Fancy; "you make me very unhappy. I am older than you, and I know that you are making a rod for your own back, and a heavy, sharp rod, too."

"I will be good!" exclaimed Clarissa, herself melting into tears. "Don't cry, Fancy, and I will do all the new mamma tells me; and I won't set Tartar at her—I promise you I won't."

"Indeed, my lady, you had better not! He would most likely be shot, if you did such a wicked thing."

"*Shot?* Papa likes Tartar; he would never have him killed."

"He would for certain, if he touched the Countess; or she might order him to be shot, you know. She will be Tartar's mistress, as well as yours and mine, and her word will be law."

"I don't like it," answered Clarissa, tearfully; "but I will try to be good. And I'll begin this very day. I will tell papa next time he talks to me that I am sorry I made him angry, and that I mean to love the new mamma—at least, if she is not very nasty and disagreeable."

But Clarissa had no opportunity of carrying her good intentions into effect. The Earl scarcely saw her again, and did not speak to her during the few days he remained at the Castle. She had greatly displeased him, and he wished her to feel that she was in disgrace. And he went back, and told Louisa that Clarissa was worse than ever, and that she must rule her with a rod of iron from the very first. It never occurred to him that he had neglected his child from her birth; that the estrangement and antagonism between them were far more his fault than hers; that some day the Nemesis of unfulfilled duties might confront him.

Mrs. Sweetapple said nothing about approaching events, but in her heart she pitied the child unfeignedly, for she knew what Clarissa was, and she had an ignorant and unreasonable aversion to stepmothers in general. Nurse largely shared the sentiment, though she hoped for the best. But she nullified all the good advice she gave by

occasionally exclaiming in Clarissa's presence, and in reference to the new Countess's coming reign, "Ah, poor lamb! poor lamb! Stepmothers have stony hearts!"

At length news of the marriage reached the Castle. There were no rejoicings; those were postponed till "the happy couple" should return from the bridal tour. But the bells rang merrily over the snow on the wedding morning, and the ringers got drunk at the Earl's expense later in the day. Upholsterers and decorators came down from London, and my lady's boudoir, in "rose colour and gold," was a marvel to all who were favoured with the sight thereof. A little longer, and a splendid carriage arrived, and carriage-horses also, and grooms and stablemen, and a most consequential coachman, and quite a little army of serving-men and serving-women, greatly to Mrs. Sweetapple's discomfiture. For she knew that her long reign was over, and old times passed away for ever, and she pitied herself almost as much as she pitied Lady Clarissa.

Lord and Lady Orwell remained abroad till the winter snows had melted, for they were keeping Easter in Rome, seeing all the grand sights, and being blessed by the Pope, and doing generally as Rome does on grand occasions. But the day came when they were expected home, and the new Countess was to be installed in her honours. And once more the bells rang their loudest peal, and the tenants kept holiday, and everybody wore white wedding favours—Tartar and the tortoiseshell kitten included. And one chapter of Clarissa's life was over, and the new leaf turned. What would be written on the blank pages to come? everybody wondered.

CHAPTER XI.

“THE ODDEST CHILD IN THE WORLD.”

“I wish I were a peasant girl,
And not a lady gay ;
I'd like upon the village green
All day to dance and play ;
I'd like to wear a russet gown
Instead of silken sheen ;
Had I been reared beneath yon thatch,
How blessed I might have been !”

“Now, my lady, promise me solemnly that you won't go and do as you did when Miss Rigby came,” said Fancy, as she turned her young mistress round and round, in order the better to contemplate her unwonted splendours of embroidered muslin, lace frills, and blush-rose ribbons ; to which Clarissa replied, “I am not thinking of any such thing, Fancy ; I am older now, and I know better ; I was such a child then.”

“You are a matter of nine months older, and little girls of eight years generally do *count* as children ; but I hope you know better than to behave as you did then. It was such a foolish thing to do, you know.”

“So it was,” replied Clarissa, with the serious air of a person convinced of error ; “whatever you may say about my being a child, Fancy, I have grown up a great deal since then. I understand most things better, and I understand, especially, that it is of no use fighting with my new mamma. She cannot be driven away, anyhow, because she comes for good ; if she could be got rid of, I think I should try what I could do, for I don't want her, and something tells me I shall not like her, neither will she like me nor Tartar.”

“Well, don't do anything to make her dislike you at first setting out. In many ways it is best we should have a Countess again. The Castle has been as dismal a place as ever I saw, but now we shall be having company again ; and though we have been very comfortable, it is not right

that a nobleman's daughter should live with only servants. I know what's what, my lady ! And now come with me to the great staircase window, where we can see the turn of the road ; as soon as the carriages are in sight, you must go to the drawing-room, and be ready to receive my lord and my lady."

"Whatever shall I say, Fancy ? I know I shall not be able to say a word if papa looks cross at me."

"You must not mind how anybody looks. The moment you hear the Earl and Countess in the gallery outside, run you to the door, advance a little way, hold out your frock—so !—put your feet in the fourth position, as Miss Rigby used to show you, and make a real curtsy—so !—and say—going a little closer as you speak—'I am very glad to see you, mamma ; I hope you have had a pleasant journey ; I hope you and papa are quite well.'"

"I cannot say that, Fancy—it's not true ; not the first part, at least. I am not glad to see her, and I can't make myself glad ; it's as much as ever I can do not to be dreadfully sorry. I can just make myself hope the journey was not disagreeable, and I do hope she is well, and papa, too ; but I can't say *I am glad*. I never did say what was not true. Why, you tell me yourself, and so do nurse and Sweetie, that I must never, no, never, on any account, tell the least bit of a fib !"

"Oh, that doesn't count as a fib, or, if it does, it's a sort that everybody, very good people, too, tells by the dozen. Of course, story-telling is very wicked and mean, but one must be polite, and say a few things one does not exactly feel."

But Clarissa shook her head. "It's of no use, Fancy ; I shall not say I am glad ; she would know I did not mean it, and papa would know, too. I should *like* to say, 'I am very sorry to see you, Lady Orwell, and though you are the Countess, you are not my mamma.' But as that won't do, I shall just make my curtsy, and say, 'Good afternoon, mamma ; I hope you have had a pleasant journey,' and the rest."

"Very well ! I don't know but what that is as good as the other, only mind you say it pleasantly. And you had better tell Tartar to be on his good behaviour ; he'll mind

what you say just like a Christian. He will be civil if you tell him he must be, though I don't expect he will be friendly. Now come along, my dear, and turn your toes out, and don't stand one foot on another, to soil and fray your nice white satin slippers."

Presently they knew by the excitement of the people down below that the carriages were approaching, and in another minute there was a cloud of dust between the tall elms, and there was the grand new travelling chariot in which the Earl and Countess were to arrive; a ponderous affair, such as one seldom sees now, drawn by four prancing white horses, with postilions, and outriders, and footmen hanging on behind, and all the show and state of a day gone by. Behind them came several other vehicles containing my lord's valet, my lady's own maid, and attendants, in charge of the luggage. Altogether, it was quite a procession—such a display as the Orwell folk had never seen in all their lives before.

As the white horses came clattering up to the grand entrance, Fancy turned to Clarissa, whispering, "Now, my lady, now is your time! run along the corridor, take the second staircase, and slip down into the drawing-room before they are well alighted. Don't be afraid."

"I am not afraid, but I feel so odd," replied Clarissa, faintly; and then Fancy saw that the child was white to the lips, and trembling all over. The girl was frightened, and ran to call nurse, who was even then looking for her charge.

"Oh, dear, dear!" cried the good woman, as Clarissa almost sank into her arms, "whatever is the matter with her? What nonsense have you been talking to her, Fancy?"

"No nonsense at all," answered Fancy, indignantly; "she was all right a minute back, then all on a sudden she turned ghastly! Whatever is it, Lady Clarissa?"

"I think I feel sick," said Clarissa, more faintly. "Please take me, nurse; I can't go down; everything spins round and round."

And so it came to pass that one part of the programme failed. The bridal pair entered the Castle in state, all the servants, save nurse and Fancy, being drawn up in the

great hall to receive them. The tenants were still loud in acclaim, and the bells were yet ringing their loudest, maddest peal; but the Earl looked in vain for his little daughter, whose attendance he had specially commanded. His brow darkened as he glanced round, and missed the quaint little figure, and the small sallow face, and he at once attributed the child's absence to sheer perversity and contumacious insolence. As for the Countess, she was too delighted with her reception, too pleased to have attained her pinnacle of glory, to feel anything like disappointment from so trivial a cause. She had never even pictured to herself such splendour, such homage. Why, it was ten times better than the Lord Mayor's show! not to be compared, indeed, with any City pageant, in which some element of vulgarity was always sure to mingle. The Countess was fast becoming disgusted with "City people" and "City grandeurs." And yet it was not so very long ago, either, that Mrs. Shrosbery had felt that her highest ambition would be satisfied, her loftiest aim reached, her Ultima Thule of earthly bliss attained, if only her Peter might enjoy the dignity of the mayoralty of the metropolis. That he should one day be Lord Mayor of London, and she the Lady Mayoress, dispensing her favours at the Mansion House, was a brilliant dream in which she had once indulged—a dream too delightful ever to come true!

And now she could afford to despise civic honours—for City honours and trade always went together—and the Countess of Orwell, on the threshold of her husband's ancestral home, might patronise any Lady Mayoress to any extent, provided only they were free of the precincts of the mighty City, in which mayors and mayoresses reign with almost regal sway. Even in that particular, though, how great was her own advantage! The Lady Mayoress was but the queen of a year, who could only take a sip at the cup of aristocratic pleasures, while she was a peer's wife to her dying day, and might drink deep of the overflowing bowl, the sweetness and exhilaration of which were beyond all that she had conceived. So she bore herself in right queenly fashion, bowing right and left, affable but dignified, cordial to a certain extent, "yet unfamiliar."

She was well satisfied that she played her part of *grande dame* successfully, and she felt every inch a *châtelaine*, as, leaning on the arm of her "noble husband," she passed onward to her own private apartments.

No one condescended to ask for Lady Clarissa; but when dinner was over, and the sumptuous dessert on the table, the door slightly opened. Nurse appeared for an instant on the threshold, and then one of the grand new footmen, being duly instructed, pompously announced—"The Lady Clarissa Oakleigh."

"What a poor little creature to have such a grand name!" was the Countess's unexpressed thought, as Clarissa, looking more insignificant than ever in her costly worked muslin and lace, shyly advanced up the long room to where her new mamma sat enthroned at the head of the table. Her magnificence did not become her; the snowy, filmy muslin was all unsuited to her angular and meagre form; the delicate, pale rose ribbons made her appear more sallow than she really was, and the pearl necklace and pendant round her scraggy, yellow throat, seemed as unfitting and out of keeping as if Tartar had worn it as an ornament. And as she approached, her slight embarrassment rapidly changing into calm self-possession—for Clarissa was generally equal to the occasion—Lady Orwell exclaimed, though quite under her breath, "What a little fright!"

But Clarissa's quick ears caught the uncomplimentary *otto voce*; and, as may readily be conjectured, it did not tend to modify her prejudices against her lady stepmother. It was in a rather sullen tone, and very much as if she were repeating a lesson learned by rote, that she said, "Good evening, mamma! I hope you have had a pleasant journey, and I hope you and papa are quite well"—at the same time making the regulation curtsy as exemplified by Miss Rigby, and improved upon by Fancy. It must be confessed that Lady Clarissa's elaborate *reverence* was a very curious performance; but it had one good effect—it amused the Earl, and banished the heavy cloud which had gathered on his brow as his daughter was announced, and he burst into a hearty laugh.

"Who is your dancing-master, Clarissa?" he asked,

mockingly. "Why, you are qualified to perform in a company of strolling players!"

"Don't daunt the child!" interposed the Countess, bent on being maternal. "Don't you see how you vex her? Never mind him, my pretty dear; it was a very nice curtsy, though, perhaps, a little overdone. Come to me, and eat some hot-house grapes, or whatever you like best. Will you have a macaroon, or a piece of sweet cake, or a candied orange, or some of this stuff?"

This stuff being a cream of some kind, most artistically produced by the *chef*, who now reigned supreme in the Orwell kitchen, and regarded Mrs. Sweetapple and her ancient staff as English ignorant barbarians. At the same moment Lady Orwell lifted Clarissa on to her knee.

Clarissa immediately wriggled down again, and quietly observed—"I am not a baby, though I am so little. I am eight years old, and I should prefer to sit on a chair."

"Oh, very well! by all means," replied the Countess, with an offended air; and the Earl remarked, "Ah! I told you what a small termagant she was, and now you may judge for yourself. You will have your hands full with her, you perceive, and I leave her to you, though I shall be surprised if you succeed in shaping her into any form of decency."

Clarissa ate, or pretended to eat, the slice of rich cake which was on her plate, and said nothing.

"Why did you not come to meet us, Clarissa?" asked her papa, presently.

"I was not well, papa," she answered. "I meant to come, but just as the carriage stopped I felt so sick, and nurse carried me to the nursery, and gave me camphor-julep."

Child-like, she did not discriminate between sickness and faintness, but she felt hotly indignant when her father went on to say, "I dare say you have been eating too much, for you seem very fond of improper food. In future, however, I think you will find private raids upon the larder to be out of the question. You are a greedy little girl!"

Mortified, angry, and still far from recovered, Clarissa crumbled her cake and wished herself anywhere in the

world but where she was. The hot tears gathered in her eyes, but, with the rare self-repression of her unchildlike nature, she drove them back, pride and a bitter sense of injustice coming to her aid. After that she refused all the fruit and sweetmeats which were offered her, and only just put her lips to the wine, in which she was required to drink to the health and happiness of the Earl and Countess of Orwell. It was a great relief when she was at last ordered away to the nursery. She was feeling very tired and sad, the rich cake had made her really qualmish, the smell of the wine had disgusted her, and the stiff stays in which, according to the custom of those times, she was tightly laced, were fast becoming unbearable. Oh! how glad she was to find herself once more safe in her own domains, nurse and Fancy quietly sewing by lamplight, and Tartar peacefully asleep upon his mat. Her dispirited aspect told her friends that she had not made the triumphant *débüt* for which they had striven; but nurse, in her usual tone, asked, "And how has it gone with my ladybird? And what does the new mamma say?"

"Oh, she says nothing nice," replied Clarissa, wearily; "and it has all gone very badly; they said I was *greedy*! and oh! Fancy, do undress me, my stays are squeezing me to death."

Fancy made haste to comply with her mistress's request, and then Clarissa, wrapped in her dressing-gown and an old faded shawl, nestled into a corner of the large antiquated nursery sofa, and began to feel a little more like her ordinary self. "Nurse," she said, gravely, "I will never wear that frock again; I saw myself from top to bottom in the glass panel they have put in the gallery, and I looked like a nasty scarecrow! She might well say I was 'a little fright.'"

"She did not call you that—sure-ly?" asked nurse, aghast, and roused to sudden anger.

"Yes, she did!—only she said it almost in a whisper. I am not sure that she meant me to hear it. But she did say it, and it was true. I was a fright in that foolish fine frock, that made me look like a picture of the wicked, crazy Lady Betty—my great, great, ever-so-many great aunts! Well, then, afterwards she called me her

'pretty dear;' and I am not pretty, but ugly, and it hurts me when I am called pretty. Put that frock away where I shall never see it again, and the sash and the ribbons, and all; and mind, both of you, I will never wear stiff stays any more—they kill me!"

"But, my lady," interposed nurse, "you *must* wear stays. They hurt everybody a little at first, and then they get used to them, and at last come to like the feel of them. Why, my dear, I once knew a lady, and she slept in her stays, because she never felt comfortable without them, though she cried bitterly, 'as she told me herself, when first her mamma's maid laced her up in them, and begged and prayed that she might have them taken off. She came to have a beautiful figure—a waist that you could span! Her complexion was far from good, though; and she died from lung disease before she was five-and-twenty."

"Don't we breathe with our lungs, nurse?"

"Yes, I think we do—indeed, I am sure of it. People that have inflammation of the lungs cannot breathe freely, and if they are not relieved in time, they die."

"Then that was why that lady died. Her stays killed her; they kept her lungs in too tight, and stopped her breath. I had rather be killed some other way. It is horrible when you can't get your breath; and I know it was the stays that made me so queer."

"No, my lady; it could not be the stays. It was just the sight of the new countess that was too much for you, as it was almost for me."

"It might have been that as well; but I am sure I should not have turned so sick if I had not been laced up. You don't know how hard Fancy had to pull before she could get those new stays together! I told her they were not half big enough, and I never will have them on again."

"Oh, but my dearie, every lady wears tight stays. You would like to have a nice slim waist when you grow up, wouldn't you? And in order to have a fine, genteel figure, you must begin lacing young."

"When did *you* begin, nurse?" asked Clarissa, mischievously, looking at that worthy's rather extensive circumference of forty inches or thereabouts.

"I, my lady? Oh, I never laced much; I had hard work to do, and I couldn't be properly tightened. Besides, it did not matter for me; it is of no consequence what kind of figure a servant has, unless, perhaps, she may be a lady's-maid. Common people need not trouble themselves about their waists."

"Then I wish I were a common person. It seems to me that common people can do so many things that lords and ladies cannot. I wish I were not *Lady Clarissa*."

"Oh, fie, my lady! Thousands of little girls would give I don't know what to be an Earl's daughter, ay, and an Earl's granddaughter, to boot. For the Orwell peerage is no creation of yesterday; you have a long line of noble ancestors, Lady Clarissa, and you ought to be thankful for your privileges."

"Ought I? I had just as soon be the gardener's daughter. I should like to be that little girl at the North Lodge—Sally Brown, I mean. She looks so pretty with her long, light curls, and her rosy cheeks, and it must be nice to wear a faded cotton frock, that she need not take any care of. And her mother kisses her, and loves her ever so, and her father says to her, 'My little maid!' and I don't suppose she will ever be troubled with a governess."

"No, indeed, my lady. If Sally learns to read and write, that is as much as she can expect, and quite as much as is good for her. I don't hold with poor girls being over-educated; it makes them discontented, and sets them up, and fills them with foolish notions, and they waste their time reading romances, which never yet did anybody the least bit of good." And here nurse looked severely at Fancy, who was too much addicted to the perusal of light literature, and often got into sad trouble through gratifying her inclinations, when she ought to have been otherwise employed. And she had the "Children of the Abbey" at that moment in her pocket, and meant to finish it that very night, if only she could find the opportunity. And nurse added—"You needn't wish to be Sally Brown, my lady, for she will have to go out to service as soon as she is old enough."

"How nice! I do wish I might go to service! It must

be such fun to clean pots and kettles. I have helped clean the harness before now, and I liked it ever so much. I suppose ladies *cannot* go to service?"

"I should think not, Lady Clarissa; who ever heard of such a thing? You are the oddest child in the world, I do believe. But it's quite time you were in bed; you must just take a powder and be off to sleep as fast as possible."

"I don't think I want a powder, nurse; I feel quite right now those horrid stays are taken off. I am sure they made me ill."

"Still, you had better have a powder, my lady. I always like to be on the safe side, and you do look bilious; so I shall give you a powder to-night and a little salts-and-senna in the morning, before you get up. What will you take your powder in?—there's honey, and jams, and marmalade."

"In nothing but water. I don't like putting physic into sweet things. If things are nasty let them be nasty, and all the jam and treacle in the world does not take off the filthy taste. I wonder if Sally Brown is always having grey powders, and salts-and-senna, and calomel?"

"Was there ever such a child?" said nurse, turning to Fancy. "Any way, you will want something to take the nasty taste out of your mouth, Lady Clarissa?"

"No! if I must have nasty things I'll know how they taste. I wish you would not be always calling me 'a child,' nurse; I feel quite, or almost, grown up."

"Bless us, my lady!" cried Fancy. "If you are grown up, you'll be nothing but a female dwarf, like one I once saw at the fair. She was forty years old, they said, and not much bigger than you are. You are mighty little yet, half a head shorter than Sally Brown, who is only just turned seven. You have a deal of growing to do, I hope, before you are grown up into a young lady."

"I didn't mean in that way; of course I shall get a good deal bigger than I am now; but I don't *feel* as if I were a child like I used to be, before Miss Rigby came. She was a sort of medicine to me, I suppose, for she was hatefully disagreeable; but, somehow, she did me good, and I think,—I am not sure——"

"Here's your powder," interrupted nurse. "I can't

have you talking yourself into a fever. You are sure you won't have it in a little currant jelly?"

"Quite sure. I like what's sweet to be sweet, and what's nasty to be nasty; I won't mix them. After all, it is only making pretence, for you always taste the physic. You would taste it if it were put into as much jelly as you could eat."

And without a wry face, Clarissa took her "grey powder" in a little water, and steadfastly declined "something to take the taste away."

Meanwhile, she was being discussed by the Earl and Countess; and the latter, of whom I have already spoken as a decidedly sharp-witted woman, at once came to the conclusion that "my lord" cared little or nothing about the offspring of his former marriage, and that she might pursue towards her any course of conduct that seemed expedient and agreeable to herself.

"Such a plain child, too!" she said, at the close of the conversation; "and a little imp of mischief, I am sure. Is she all right here?" and she raised her jewelled fingers to her forehead as she spoke.

"Oh, yes," replied the Earl, hastily; he did not quite like the insinuation, and he added, "She is too sharp, by a great deal; she can talk like an old woman. She has more brains than enough, I should say; and *such a spirit!* She does not appear to be afraid of anything."

"As for spirit, I will be bound to match hers," proudly replied the Countess. "I have always been used to my own way, and I am not going to knock under to a child; so my Lady Clarissa had best mind what she is about. But I do wish she had a better complexion, and was not so very thin. She does not take after you, my lord; and I think you said she did not resemble her mother?"

"Her mother was the loveliest woman who ever breathed," replied his lordship, gravely; "and as good and sweet as lovely. I have never seen her equal. Here is her portrait." And he took from a cabinet close by a beautifully executed miniature on ivory of the late Countess, and placed it before his wife. The present Countess contemplated it with secret dissatisfaction. Yes, her predecessor was lovely indeed; and would not people

sometimes draw invidious comparisons? And would not my lord sometimes contrast her own beauty—such as it was—with that of this exquisite creature, and not favourably as regarded herself? She soon closed the case, saying coldly, "Miniatures on ivory are always flattered." And Lord Orwell replied as coldly, "It was impossible to flatter her; no artist ever did, or could, do her full justice."

From that moment Louisa, Countess of Orwell, hated the memory of that beautiful dead woman. She was as jealous of the departed Countess Clarissa, as if she were a living breathing woman, to whom her lord paid undue allegiance.

There are two kinds of jealousy—one which may proceed from excess of love, and which may flatter for a little while, though it is sure to irk and disgust, if too long persisted in; and another kind, far commoner, and altogether detestable—the jealousy which is born of self-love, of an exacting spirit, and of bad temper. The first kind of jealousy may be borne with, though it always lowers the woman who displays it; the second is simply intolerable, and gradually undermines and destroys even the most ardent affection. Woe betide the woman who cherishes it ever so little, for she is always trampling under foot the flowers of life, and plucking thorns that pierce her to the heart—always flinging away pure gems to gather up sharp, wounding flints. And woe to the unfortunate man whom she calls husband! It was this miserable kind of jealousy to which the new Lady Orwell was much inclined.

CHAPTER XII.

THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET.

" By our own niggard rule we try
The hope to suppliant's given;
We mete our love as if our eye
Saw to the end of heaven.

" Yes, ransom'd sinner ! wouldst thou know
How often to forgive,
How dearly to embrace thy foe—
Look where thou hop'st to live."

THE more the new Countess saw of her step-daughter, the more she secretly disliked her, though she still called her a "pretty dear," and insisted on her coming down every evening to dessert, exceedingly to Clarissa's discomfiture. Clarissa did, most unfeignedly, "try to be good;" but utterly undisciplined, and brought suddenly into subjection to an entirely uncomprehending and ungenial person, her endeavours proved notably unsuccessful, and were not long in coming to a close. The child, in spite of her queer tastes and caprices, and her innumerable *gaucheries*, was a genuine little lady, naturally endued with a strong contempt for those people whom society stigmatises as "snobs." That is to say, she hated pretension and insincerity; she rather liked poor folks, and was particularly fond of nurse, Fancy, and Sweetie, and some of her friends about the stable; but then they never claimed to be what they were not, and never tried to assume the style and manner of their superiors. She wanted very much to have pretty Sally Brown as a playmate, and she would fain have cultivated an intimacy over the wash-tub or at the ironing-board with Mrs. Brown herself—the good woman was her ladyship's laundress; she had not, as her humble friends frequently averred, "the least bit of pride about her," and yet, for all that, no prouder "daughter of a hundred earls" ever walked the earth than Lord Orwell's small, untaught, sickly-looking little Clarissa.

I told you that the Countess had a goodly share of that most questionable gift which is assuredly very strongly allied, in its essence and character, to that undeveloped power called *psychic* or *odysic*—the gift of intuition. Coarse natures have this strange capacity in common with fine ones : it is only dull natures that know it not, and are, for the most part, sceptics as regards its existence. And that the majority of even civilised human creatures are dull, apathetic, and passive, so long as self-love and self-appreciation are not roused to antagonism, must be, I think, generally conceded.

Lady Orwell knew that Clarissa neither liked her nor held her in esteem ; even when the child was most outwardly deferential and submissive, there was a certain unexpressed something in every act and word that told she submitted as a mere matter of compulsion to the lady of the Castle. One thing, however, was patent—Clarissa was in her stepmother's hands, and the Earl would enforce his wife's authority, and would not interfere, whatever were the feud. All about Lady Orwell saw plainly that she meant to rule autocratically, and that what she desired to do she would do, and whom she resolved to vanquish she would vanquish, and that strong measures would be quite in her way, if she found herself opposed, or her intentions circumvented. She was determined that all should bend to her, that all beneath her sway should be moulded to her will ; and, as regarded her household generally, she perceived that there would be little, if any, difficulty, except in the one instance of her step-daughter, who would hold her own, and maintain, to a certain extent, her independence.

She laid her plans—those plans which were to bring Clarissa into gradual and complete subjection, into the bondage which she told herself would be the best and only thing for such a child ! But she was prudent, and did not at once swoop down upon her victim at one fell stroke ; she did not attempt a *coup-de-main*, sorely as she was tempted to do it, when she failed to make such an impression as she desired. She said very little, and apparently her interest in Clarissa deepened ; but slowly, so slowly that no one, save nurse and Fancy, discerned it,

the child's liberties were curtailed, restraints were multiplied, rules were imposed, harassing restrictions came thick and threefold, and the result was, that the little girl was continually in trouble, under punishment, and in dire disgrace.

Lady Clarissa was really very clever, but, in simple cleverness, she had met her match. She could not cope with one so much older than herself, and one, moreover, who could not be regarded as a usurper, though she might exercise her prerogative far beyond due bounds. She began to feel that struggle was hopeless, that a web was being woven about her, binding her hand and foot, and, worst of all, she found herself continually watched, and checked, and chidden. She might not please herself, it seemed, in the merest trifle; she must take such walks as she was bidden; she must play such games as were appointed; she must sit, stand, and even lie, in certain set positions. She must do all things from morning to night, from Sunday to Saturday, according to an appointed formula, which might not be, in the smallest degree, infringed. This treatment would have made many a child a liar and a cheat; but Clarissa was truth in itself, and she scorned deceit, and could not be brought to exercise even the smallest cunning. A little *tact* might frequently have saved her a good deal of trouble, but she was no advocate for expediency; it was partly the inherent integrity of her nature, and partly the fearlessness of a brave and defiant spirit, that made her what she was, and kept up ceaseless antagonism between the Countess and herself.

The summer months passed sadly for the child. No more climbing of trees and tearing of frocks; no more romps with Sally Brown; no more lonely rambles with Tartar; no more intimacies in the stable-yard. So far so good; it was high time that there should come a *finale* to not a few of Clarissa's peculiarities; it was necessary that she should be turned from "a tom-boy" into a little lady; but it was not necessary, nor was it in any sense desirable, that she should be peremptorily cut off from all her former pursuits, privileges, and associations. She lost, in every way, far more than she gained under the new and intolerable *régime* from which she saw no hope of escape,

and she writhed vainly under the yoke which pressed upon her far more heavily than anyone supposed. Her gardening came to an end; she was forbidden to touch spade, or rake, or fork; she might not pluck up weeds, nor gather vegetables; she dare not as much as look into the stable-yard, and the pet animals were all sent away, or killed. Lady Orwell hated cats and dogs, and so Tartar was chained up at last, and the tortoiseshell kitten was very quickly missing; and, to make amends, she was ordered to amuse herself with a Parisian dressed doll, to receive dancing lessons twice a week, and to lie on a reclining board, hold the backboard, and stand in "the stocks," for the improvement of her carriage and figure, four hours every day. Worst of all, she was condemned to wear the stiffest and tightest of stays, and if she stooped or "poked," an iron instrument also, which not only inconvenienced her, but gave her actual pain.

"It's too much," said nurse, one day, to Fancy, about three months after the Countess's arrival; "she won't stand it much longer, I know. It was quite right that she should be made to behave herself like a young lady; she was growing too old for the romping, rough ways she had got into, through being without any proper control; but there was no call to make a little negro slave of her, and to take away her animals, and her garden, and to put her in the stocks, just for all the world like a common vagabond! But there will be an upset soon, see if there isn't! I don't take her part openly, because it would do her no good, and only get her into scrapes, and I hope you don't, Fancy. It will be the worse for her and for yourself, too, if you do."

But Fancy did take her young lady's part, and that most injudiciously. It was not much to be wondered at, for Fancy was naturally pert and self-willed, and only seventeen, and she did not scruple to aver that "she hated the Countess like poison, and that she wasn't by any means her notion of what a lady should be." And as the new servants all cringed to the Countess, and as Fancy evidently gloried in imprudence, it followed, as a matter of course, that she got her dismissal more speedily and suddenly than was agreeable.

One day Lady Orwell sent for her, and her own maid, who brought the message, intimated that Fancy was about to pay the penalty of her countless misdemeanours. "I wouldn't be in your shoes," said Mrs. Ruffles, as she smiled maliciously, and bade the girl make haste, and not keep her betters waiting! Fancy tossed her head, and contemptuously regarded the London-bred waiting woman, whom she heartily despised, and whom she had from the very first constituted her enemy. It was that young person's infirmity to speak her mind all too plainly; and as she had a ready wit and a sharp tongue, she succeeded in affronting a good many people who had it in their power to resent substantially their real or fancied insults. Mrs. Ruffles had determined long before that that "young hussy" Fancy should lose her place, and, if possible, her character.

The Countess sat in her boudoir, looking very imposing, attired in ruby velvet and point lace, with ostrich plumes and diamonds in her hair; she was expecting guests of consequence to dinner. She at once addressed the girl: "Fancy Flann!—that is your name, I believe—very unpleasant reports of your conduct have reached me from time to time, and I have come to the conclusion that your influence and example are injurious to Lady Clarissa. You will, therefore, leave the Castle immediately. That is all."

"Leave immediately, my lady?" replied Fancy, almost stunned. She knew she had been standing on dangerous ground, but she was not prepared for an abrupt dismissal. She had often threatened "to give notice," but it had never entered into her mind that she would be thus violently separated from her young mistress, whom she truly loved.

"Yes, *immediately!*" returned the Countess, in her coldest, haughtiest tones.

"You don't mean *now*, this very day?" urged Fancy, ready to burst into tears.

"This very day," was Lady Orwell's answer. "Ruffles, take that tuberoses away; the scent is overpowering. You need not remain, Fancy; I have nothing else to say, and I am tired. Mrs. Sweetapple will give you a month's wages. Ruffles, where is that new novel?"

But Fancy seemed rooted to the spot; she could not believe that she was awake. Had she not once dreamt something like this before, only very long ago? Surely, surely it was not real!

Leave Lady Clarissa, and *at once*? It could not, must not be! "I am sure I am very sorry if I have offended you, my lady!" began Fancy, feeling that she would humble herself to any extent rather than be torn from the child to whom she clung so fondly, and remembering at that moment some of her most impertinent speeches, which had doubtless been carried to the Countess. But Lady Orwell waved her hand—"Be so good as to retire," she said, majestically; "apologies are useless, excuses are un-availing. You are an improper person to be about Lady Clarissa, and I therefore dismiss you. Ruffles, see that Fancy packs up her things directly; in two hours I shall expect her to be gone."

"Yes, my lady; certainly, my lady!" replied Ruffles. "What do you stop here for, you naughty, stupid girl? Be off, and get ready to go in two hours' time! If you don't mend, you'll run to your own ruin, that I see!"

"Look out that you don't run to ruin yourself!" cried Fancy, her sorrow changing into wrath; "I know you for what you are—a viper! a spiteful cat! a snake in the grass! Ugh! I wouldn't be you, Ruffles!"

Upon which, the Countess forgot her high rank, and scolded hard and fast, just as Mrs. Shrosbery had scolded her maids of old at Peckham Rye. Her mamma, the Whitechapel greengroceress, could not have rated the girl more soundly. An aristocrat in outward seeming—for she had learnt her lessons quickly and well—Louisa was a plebeian in heart, and essentially vulgar, for she had never acquired the patrician virtue of self-control, and when "*put about*," as her own phrase was, never hesitated to vituperate in what Mrs. Hadfield called "polite Billingsgate." And when she quarrelled, her verbs, nouns, and pronouns quarrelled, too; her aspirates played at hide-and-seek, and she spoke out broad and strong—a veritable and unmistakable Cockney. She wound up by informing Fancy that she need not expect to get a cha-

racter from Orwell, and that she would die in a ditch, and serve her right, for her abominable impudence!

Fancy, who would have died now rather than show the white feather, replied with severe irony, "Indeed, I should never think of your ladyship giving me a character! I am very particular who *I* go to for a character, I can assure you, my lady. There are some people whose bad word is better than their good word, and everybody isn't competent to form an opinion, or to express one either. Never fear, my lady; I shall not think of coming to you for a character!"

To which Lady Orwell, white with passion, replied, "Leave the room this instant, you saucy baggage; if you don't, I'll have you removed by one of the men-servants. And, Ruffles, go and fetch Lady Clarissa here; I shall not permit any further intercourse between her and this young person."

And so there were no leave-takings possible. Lady Clarissa wondered why she was kept a whole weary evening in the Countess's dressing-room, and she knew nothing about Fancy's abrupt departure till nurse attended her at bedtime, and told her all the truth. Then she stood still in angry amazement. "Fancy gone! gone quite away, did you say, nurse? Who sent her away?"

"Your mamma, of course, Lady Clarissa. And to tell the truth, I was afraid it would come to this, for Fancy was very outspoken, and she didn't mind who heard what she said."

"But she was *my* servant!" interrupted Clarissa. "I suppose mamma had a right to dismiss her, but it was shameful to send her off all in a hurry without saying a word to me, or even letting her wish good-bye. My dear Fancy! what shall I do without her? I hate the Countess; she has taken away all that I love and care for. She'll take *you* next, nurse."

Nurse had her private apprehensions on this score, but she replied, calmly, "I hope not, Lady Clarissa; I don't think my lord would permit *that*. Why, I have been with you ever since you were born, and your own dear blessed ma that's gone to glory left you in my charge. I'll tell you a bit of a secret. My lady, she wanted to

get rid of Mrs. Sweetapple, who didn't know her place nor her duties, she declared; but the Earl would not hear of it. Says he, I'm told, 'No, no! Sweetapple has been in service here almost fifty years; she was here in my mother's time, and her mother was one of the head servants in my grandmother's time. She has served four Countesses of Orwell, and surely she may serve your turn, my lady. No, no! Sweetapple is a fixture, remember.' And though I have not been in the family anything like so long, I don't think my lord would consent to my dismissal. Any way, if I have warning, I shall appeal to him."

"You can't, if she packs you off at two hours' notice, as she has done Fancy, and papa is going to Scotland for ever so long next week. Oh, nurse! I do downright hate her; she is ten times worse than Miss Rigby."

"My lady, you must not hate anybody; it's very unchristianlike and improper. Don't you know the Bible bids us love our enemies?"

"Then she will have to love me, for I mean to be her enemy in future; and the Bible is for grown-up people as well as for boys and girls, I suppose. If you take the Bible only on one side, it's very disagreeable; if you take it for everybody, it is all right, I think."

"Whatever do you mean, Lady Clarissa?"

"Why, this—I am always being told that I must be obedient, and gentle, and humble, and that I must forgive the people that spite me, and now *you* say that I must love my enemies. And it seems to me that I must be all this and a great deal more, but that it does not matter how rough and proud and unforgiving *she* is! And she tells fibs, I know she does; I heard her tell one to papa only the other day—a very great fib, too! I wonder she was not ashamed, for fibbing is so mean and vulgar; but then she is vulgar, is she not, nurse?"

"Now, Lady Clarissa, it is of no use to talk in that way. It's of no mortal use to put yourself in opposition to her; the more you fight against her the worse it will be for you in the end. So just give in, and try what obedience and pretty little ways will do."

"I have tried, and I don't mean to try any longer.

The more I give in to her, the more she requires. You need not talk to me, nurse. You know she is downright horrid and nasty as well as I do; and you know that when I have once made up my mind, I stick to it. I am going to fight her, and, what is more, I shall tell her so. I am not a coward, and I don't pretend."

"My own dearie, you don't know what you will bring upon yourself."

"Yes, I do. She will plague me more than ever; but I think I can be a match for her. Don't look so frightened, nurse, dear; she can't *kill* me, you know, and I should not so very much mind if she did. It is not so very nice to be alive."

"Oh, my lady, that you should say such a thing at your age! No! she won't kill you, as you say. She won't even try; but she can make your life a misery to you; she can punish you from morning to night; she can make you wish you were not Lady Clarissa Oakleigh."

"*She cannot!* And if I choose, she cannot make me miserable. She can shut me up, and set me lessons, and take away my creatures; she can beat me, and starve me, if she pleases; but it is only my *outside* that she can hurt. She can't touch the thing in me that *thinks*; and that is really *ME!* And so I don't care for her. I would have cared if she had been one bit *nice*; but she isn't, so I am going to fight her now in good earnest, and to-morrow I shall tell her so. I am not afraid."

Nurse wisely thought she had better say no more. She knew her young lady too well, and was quite aware that opposition and dissuasion would only strengthen her determination. But she trembled for the result. There would be open war between the Countess and her step-daughter, and it was not difficult to see on which side would be the victory.

A few minutes afterwards Clarissa knelt down to say her prayers. She no longer said them aloud; since her eighth birthday she had been permitted, at her own request, to perform her devotions privately. That evening, after a very curious *mélange* of petitions, in which was included a request that Tartar might be taken care of, and restored to her society, she began, according to custom,

to say the Lord's Prayer. She repeated it, as usual, like an Abracadabra, not even comprehending what it meant, or recognising its Divine origin. She gabbled it to herself till she came to "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." Then she stopped and pondered—"Trespasses!—that means naughtinesses. I don't mean to forgive her, *ever*, so it is of no use my saying that any more. It is of no use trying to be good. I'll tell her so to-morrow. When she leaves off trespassing against me, I'll leave off trespassing against her, and I'll forgive her, but not till then. I don't like to leave off saying that, it does not seem right, but it can't be helped. I won't say what I don't mean; besides, God would know I didn't mean it, and so it would be no use."

Next day Clarissa was as good as her word. In the morning, spite of nurse's entreaties, she dressed without her stiff stays, she put on one of the old print frocks that she used to wear when she went out with Fancy and Tartar, and she refused to have her hair tied up in plaits, a *coiffure* which was decidedly unbecoming in her case, but which Lady Orwell pronounced to be the proper fashion for young ladies under twelve years of age.

"You'll get *me* into fine trouble," said nurse, when her young mistress took comb and brush from her hands, and tossed her hair ribbons to the other end of the room.

"No, I will not," she replied; "of course I shall say I did it myself, and that it was no fault of yours. Ah! how delicious it is without those stays; I feel as strong again! I am going to have a run in the garden and say 'Good morning,' to Tartar; then I shall want my breakfast, and then the Countess will ring for me, and then—*and then!* For I mean to stick to what I said last night, nurse!"

"Poor child!" said nurse, as she watched her from the window, running down the paths that led towards the offices where Tartar now resided. "What will be the end of it? She's wrong, of course, and I can't set her right; I sometimes wish the Lord had taken her when she was a baby. If only somebody would come that understood her, and that would be her friend and control her in the right way. She has a fine brave spirit of her own, and she would make a fine grand

woman if she were but led to goodness, not driven. Besides, it isn't goodness, but badness, that my lady's rule calls up in her. I wonder if it would be any good to ask God to send somebody to save this child from herself, and from those who may, if they are provoked, make a devil of her? At any rate, I'll try; as she says, the Bible is for us all; and it does say, plain enough, 'Ask and ye shall receive.' Yes, I'll try what praying will do. I wonder I never thought of it before. If anybody in this weary world ever wanted a true friend 'tis she—poor motherless child! I think I'll ask the Lord to send her one. He won't think it ill of me, I know; anyhow, He can do as He pleases, and He did tell us to ask Him for what we really want. Yes, I'll lay it before *Him!*"

The wisest and happiest conclusion at which you could have arrived, Nurse Barlow!

CHAPTER XIII.

"IT IS MY DUTY."

"Farewell, my noble hound!"

"LADY CLARISSA, my lady desires you will come to her this very instant in her own *budwar*," shouted Mrs. Ruffles, the Countess's own woman. "Do you hear, my Lady Clarissa?—you naughty, tiresome, perverse little thing! Where are you?"

For Clarissa was nowhere to be seen, though her clear, shrill voice had been heard addressing someone not half a minute before. The lady's-maid was standing in one of the long, dusky passages in the upper story of the Castle. She did not like the locality, for the much-dreaded ghost-rooms were close at hand, and a little further on was a twisting flight of steep, narrow stairs,

leading to a series of lumber attics, which were very seldom invaded by any of the family, on account of a dismal tragedy said to have been enacted among the timbers of the roof some three centuries before. All that suite of upper rooms looking towards the north-east were *haunted*, according to certain legends current in the household, and tales were told in the servants' hall, and even in Mrs. Sweetapple's parlour, of dismal shrieks re-echoing in the dead of night; of a lady all in white coming down the little break-neck staircase, wringing her hands and piteously wailing; of the faint crying of an apparently weak young baby in one of the mysterious garrets—the dark one, in which Clarissa declared you could not see your hand if you held it up close to your face; and several other thrilling and romantic stories, all relating to the sins and sorrows of long ago dead and buried Oakleighs of Orwell.

At the time of which I write, a belief in ghosts was considered rather creditable than otherwise—at least in certain circles, and those far above the uneducated masses. Though why I should speak of such a belief as being characteristic of a bygone era I really do not know, since ghosts are in our day not only supposed actually to exist, but admitted to polite society and encouraged to play unseemly pranks, and listened to with deference when they discourse, not sweet music, but veritable nonsense and puerile gossip, and that in such vile English that one is seriously concerned at the bare suggestion of the retrograde mental processes that must take place after death. So while the present generation holds *séances* and devotes itself to table-rapping, it cannot fairly laugh at its grandfathers and grandmothers, who were visited by hideous hags in yellow sacques, and touched by death-cold fingers, and frightened out of their senses by unearthly voices. Only the ghosts of the past did speak grammar when they spoke at all, which proves them to have been of a superior order to those now called up in the spiritualistic circles in this present highly cultivated and refined decade of the nineteenth century.

So much for ghosts, of which the house of Orwell kept a good supply continually on hand. Mrs. Ruffles felt ex-

tremely nervous as she stood almost at the foot of the aforesaid winding stairway, and wished she had had the sense to bring one of the under-servants with her. True it is, it was not dark, nor even dusk, for it was not much past ten in the morning, and the sun was struggling through the grey mists; but then that particular passage was always rather dark and eerie, for the windows which gave it light were small, and deeply set in the thick walls, and much overshadowed by the ivy, which had been allowed to grow unrestrainedly, even to the roof, at that remote corner of the Castle. Also it was far away from the inhabited rooms and the corridors where every-day modern life prevailed; and if a ghost should unfortunately choose that precise moment to put in an appearance, Mrs. Ruffles knew very well that no shrieks or outcries would avail to bring anybody to her assistance. She was just on the point of beating a retreat, and telling the Countess that Lady Clarissa was not to be found, when there fell upon her startled ear *a sound!*—a sigh, a long-drawn, audible sigh, so audible as to be something more than a sigh, though scarcely a moan, and less than a wail. And then followed “a deep groan,” according to the abigail’s account, though an unprejudiced person might have hesitated whether to call it a snore or a growl. And then there was a light step, and a childish voice was heard addressing someone: “I think, if you please, we will leave the remainder of our conversation till another day. In the meantime, the Princess Emeraldina will take into consideration the scheme proposed, Rosalind will continue her studies, and Lady Margaret will hold herself in readiness should her assistance be required. Don’t frown, Lady Betty; I really have nothing to say to you; but I promise that I will before long—when I see fit, that is—introduce you to the Countess Loo. Come, my prince, we shall be wanted; and, prince, mind what I have said to you; *don’t forget!*”

The voice was the voice of Lady Clarissa, only pitched in a high, unnatural key, as if she were rehearsing a character in a play. The words were mysterious, but they reassured Ruffles; for Clarissa, though a little uncanny at times, was certainly no ghost. She called again, more

sharply than before—"Lady Clarissa, I say! if you don't come down this very minute, I'll go and tell your ma, and then see if you don't get punished."

Thus adjured, Clarissa appeared at the headway of the stairs, and replied, "Well, Ruffles, what have you to say to me?"

"I have a message from the Countess, and you'd best make haste down and listen to it."

"If you have a message to me, I will thank you to come up and deliver it."

"Come up to you, indeed! I am not going to break my neck getting up to such a cock-loft. Come down this very minute, you bad child, and listen to what I have to say."

"Can't you say it as you stand? I hear you quite plainly. Most certainly I shall not come down at your bidding, because you speak so rudely. Besides, it is only proper that you should come to me, not I to you—you are Lady Orwell's maid! I am Lady Clarissa Oakleigh! Please to go away, you disturb me."

"I'll not budge, you provoking little wretch! I'll not stir an inch, till you come down to me. Who are you talking to up there?"

"To several friends and relations of mine; Lady Margaret is my great-great-grandmother, the Princesses are beautiful young ladies, kept in confinement by a wicked fairy. We are intimate friends. As for Prince Don Georgio Tartarus, you had better not offend him."

"Don't stand there, telling heaps of lies, you wicked child! Come down when I bid you."

"Ruffles, you do disturb me. If you don't go away, I shall be obliged to make you."

"Make me! Why, your ma couldn't make me do what I hadn't a mind to, much less a skinny, yellow-faced baby like you!"

"Ruffles, I don't want to be hard upon you, but you are extremely vulgar and impertinent, and if you will not go when I bid you, you must take the consequences. *I am not alone!*"

"Who have you got with you?"

"You had better not wait to see. You will, you say? Here he comes, then!"

And before Mrs. Ruffles could reply there was a wild rush and a dash, and down the stairs, headlong, came a huge creature, in a scarlet mantle, with a curious fur-cap on its head, fastened beneath the chin. Of course, you will at once understand that it was only Tartar, dressed up as Prince Don Georgio, and set at liberty by his mistress, as her first demonstration of open revolt. But Ruffles thought she was pursued by a monster or a demon, and she fled as fast as her feet could carry her, shrieking wildly as she went. Tartar pursued her a little way, and then slackened speed; he quite understood that he was required to scare, but not to attack, the enemy. Clarissa at once disrobed him, saying, "There now, my dear dog, we have got into a grand scrape! That noisy, impudent woman will tell a fine story, will she not? What had we better do, Tartar? Shall we stay here, and wait for another summons? I think perhaps we should go down now of our own accord. I should not like to be seized, and carried. Though I don't think they would touch me in a hurry, while you were by, dear dog; and then no one cares to come here, because of the darling ghosts; I am quite sure Countess Loo is afraid of them!"

A few minutes afterwards Clarissa and her faithful attendant made their appearance at the door of Lady Orwell's *boudoir*. Ruffles, however, had not yet arrived; she had taken refuge in the butler's pantry, there to indulge in a fit of elegant hysterics, and to enjoy the butler's sympathy. The Countess's first words were—"How did that brute get loose?"

"I unchained him," replied Clarissa; "if I had not, he would have broken away. He has never been used to being chained. Besides, I wanted him."

"You naughty, disobedient child! But you shall be punished. Don't think you will conquer me. I'll break your bold spirit before I have done with you. What have you to say for yourself?"

"Only that I did try to be good, and it was of no use at all. I could not be *your sort of good*, and so I have given it up. I mean to do as I like."

"Do you mean openly to defy me?"

"I suppose so, but I am not quite sure what defy means."

I wanted to tell you that I cannot be what you want me to be, so I shall not *pretend* to be good: I don't like pretending except in my plays."

Lady Orwell looked, as she well might, *astonished*. The small, quaint creature spoke with all the calm decision of a self-controlled, matured personage. One tiny hand rested on Tartar's head; the animal appeared to listen to what she said, and he looked almost as preternaturally sage as Clarissa herself. Before she could think what to reply, Ruffles, still panting and sobbing, entered, supported by Marianne, her subordinate. She was greatly surprised to see Clarissa—whom she had supposed to be still in the garrets—standing there, apparently quite composed.

"Oh! you are there, you dreadful child!" she commenced, with another outbreak. "My lady, I hoped to have served your ladyship for many years; but it can't be! I can't stay in the same house with Lady Clarissa."

"What is it now, Ruffles?" asked the Countess, fretfully. "What have you been doing, Clarissa?"

Clarissa smiled as Ruffles, without giving her any opportunity of replying, poured out her lamentable story. It was such a curious, unconnected tale, that the Countess could not comprehend it at all; she only gathered that her step-daughter had committed some enormity, and that too in conjunction with some other person or persons, at whose identity she could not even guess. She was fairly puzzled, and when the waiting-woman's incoherent account came to an abrupt conclusion, she was just as much in the dark as ever. She, therefore, turned to Clarissa, demanding an explanation.

"But I don't know what Ruffles means," answered the child, quietly. "There were no people there, except myself and Tartar."

"My lady, as I live, I heard her talking to several people; and I do think they answered her. As for the thing she set at me, it must have been a demon."

Clarissa burst out laughing. "Why, a demon is a kind of devil, isn't it? It was only Tartar, Ruffles; but he was dressed up for Don Georgio; I knew he would not hurt you unless I let him. I only wanted to frighten you, you

were so tiresome, and you know you were extremely disrespectful."

"What is it all about, Clarissa?" again demanded the bewildered Countess; "and who were the people to whom you were talking? Now tell the truth, and nothing but the truth, for if you fib I shall be sure to find you out."

"I always tell the truth," replied Clarissa, proudly; "no Oakleigh ever tells a lie, and if you were one of *us* you would know that. I was talking to two sorts of people—first, my own people, the ghosts, you know; and next, a lot of story people, that I have made up partly out of books and fairy tales that were read to me, and partly out of my own head."

"You were talking to your own people, the ghosts—what can you mean, child?"

"Did you not know about them? Shall I tell you? Well, I only know of three, and I only talk to two. Lady Margaret was papa's great-grandmother, and she either did something very wicked, or else something very wicked was done to her. I can never make out which it was, but she is so pretty in her picture I feel sure she did nothing wrong. Lady Betty was ugly, like me, and she was downright bad; there is no doubt of it. She will come to see you before long."

Lady Orwell shrieked. "Good heavens, child, you must be mad! No, thank you; I decline to receive your wicked Lady Betty. I have always been accustomed to respectable flesh and blood. Ruffles, whatever does she mean? She looks in earnest."

"Indeed, my lady, I don't know. I have heard the servants' gossip, and that is all. They are so dreadfully ignorant and superstitious down in the country, my lady, there is no end to their ridiculousness. If I were you, my lady, I would not let Lady Clarissa talk such nonsense. Of course, it is all wicked stories; she never sees anything; now, do you, my Lady Clarissa?"

"I never said I did, Ruffles. But I like to talk to them, and it seems to me—it *really* seems as if they were there. And I tell them all that I think about. They are my own relations, you know."

"But, in future, you will have nothing to do with them, and I shall have those rooms fastened up securely. It is very bad for you, Clarissa, this sort of thing. You will grow up half crazy, if you persist in such foolishness. I shall talk to your papa about it."

Clarissa said nothing; her face was absolutely expressionless. Of course, Lady Orwell was perfectly right in her conclusions. A more unhealthy life for a child to lead could scarcely be imagined. It was quite time that she should be separated from her beloved ghosts, as well as from her old allies—the stable-boys. And if the separation had been kindly and judiciously effected, I think Clarissa, who was wonderfully reasonable, would have quietly acquiesced. But the Countess, who was of an ungenerous character, and who disliked—perhaps, not unnaturally—her troublesome little step-daughter, rather rejoiced in her discomfiture. She had no idea of making things easier to a stubborn will; and she felt that the time was come to enforce, with a high hand and at any cost, her own lawful authority. The spirit of antagonism had also been strongly aroused in Clarissa's breast. It remained to see who would win the day. Though, all things considered, it was not difficult to guess which of the two would be victorious.

"And Tartar—or whatever you call that dreadful animal—must be chained up again directly. It is not safe to let him go at large."

"He has gone about all his life; he never was fastened till you came. Miss Rigby ordered him to be chained in the stable-yard; but the servants could not do it, and I would not, and I will not now."

"Oh, there are plenty of men about the place! I shall just give my orders."

"He will not stay chained," said Clarissa, earnestly, "and he is quite safe if people treat him politely." Then, changing her tone—"He cannot bear to be fastened, and he will not, and I shall not let him be. After all, he is *my* dog, and I ought to have him."

"You will not have him! You must at once promise to give him up, and your pretended ghosts likewise. Clarissa, I am not to be trifled with."

And Clarissa and Tartar both looked as if they were not to be trifled with either.

Clarissa replied—"No, I shall not give him up, nor the ghosts; they are all I have, now you have sent Fancy away. Nurse is very kind, but she does not understand. Please, I want to tell you that I am not going to try to be good any more—your sort of good, I mean! I don't think I shall be very naughty, for I have left off going into passions, and I know it is quite right that I should learn lessons. But I did try to do as you bade me, and now I shall not try any longer. That is all!"

The Countess could scarcely reply for astonishment. She did not feel as though she were at odds with a mere child; for the small creature regarding her with such imperturbable gravity neither pouted, nor scowled, nor fretted, nor showed any childish temper. Lady Orwell, however, was at a white heat, and without more ado, she took hold of Clarissa, shook her violently, and boxed her ears most soundly, the waiting-woman looking on approvingly, and exclaiming—"That's the way, my lady! break her proud spirit for her. That's the only way with such as her!"

But Lady Orwell's triumph was short-lived. With one deep bay that sounded like a brief and sudden thunder-clap, Tartar sprang upon her, and the results might have been terrible, had not Clarissa thrown her arms round the dog's neck, and with her thin cheek pressed to his huge head, half commanded him and half implored him to let go. Ruffles fled from the apartment, screaming loudly, so there was no one to assist Lady Orwell in her scramble to her feet. She was happily unhurt, though her morning wrapper was rent and soiled; but she was very much frightened and thoroughly unnerved. All things considered, she might well be forgiven the fit of hysterics which ensued. Clarissa withdrew with her formidable ally; but Tartar's doom was sealed.

The doctor had to be called in before Lady Orwell could be properly recovered, and he at once said to the Earl, "My lord, that animal is not safe. Luckily, he has not bitten the Countess; but the shock must have been terrible, and even now I cannot answer for the consequences." My lord was seriously displeased, and at once

sent out peremptory orders to shoot the dog. Then, having comforted his wife, he sought his daughter, and spoke to her as she had never, in all her life, been spoken to. She could not understand with what dreadful crime he charged her; but she knew that she ought not to have taken Tartar to her stepmother's room. At last, however, the light broke upon her, and she exclaimed, indignantly, "You don't think, papa, *that I set the dog on mamma?*"

"You know you did, Clarissa," he replied, gravely. "Do not attempt to deny it; do not add lying to your wickedness. And you do not know what you have done; this may cost your mamma her life."

"But," she continued, urgently, "mamma does not say that I set Tartar at her?"

"She did not contradict Ruffles, who told me, in her presence, that the moment she attempted to chastise you for your insufferable insolence and your obstinate disobedience, you made a sign which Tartar understood, and he at once sprang upon the Countess."

"I did not, papa; I declare I did not," said Clarissa. "I never thought of such a thing; indeed, there was no time to think, for I did not know what was going to happen; and mamma shook me so that I could not tell where I was. I never was shaken before, and I don't like it; it takes the senses out of one. But if you will not believe me"—for she saw that he did not—"it is of no consequence; only, I think," she added, proudly, "that my word ought to be as good as Ruffles's."

"Did you, or did you not, set the dog on Ruffles when she came to you with your mamma's message?"

"I told Tartar to chase her when she would not go away. He knew quite well that he was only to frighten her. He did not even touch her."

"That was as it happened; Ruffles has nothing to thank you for. And if you were capable, as you admit you were, of the one abominable trick, you were certainly capable of the further enormity with which you are charged. Clarissa, I don't know how to deal with you; you ought to be forced to repentance in dust and ashes! I mean that no punishment, no humiliation, can be too great in order to bring you to confession and contrition.

But you seem to me impracticable ; and now, to a malice which it is frightful to contemplate in such a child, you add the meanness of a lie, and persist in it."

She was silent, standing before him with her hands firmly clasped, and her eyes fixed on the carpet at his feet.

"Do you hear me, Clarissa?" he went on; "or is it that you are too much ashamed to speak to me, or to look me in the face?"

"I am not ashamed," she replied, looking boldly up. "I have not told a lie, not the least bit of one. I am sorry the dog frightened mamma. I was frightened myself, for I knew he might tear her, and the moment she let me go I sprang upon him, so that he could not bite without hurting me; and he would not do that. And, papa, I cannot be what mamma calls 'good;' I have tried ever since she came in the spring. I tried, because Fancy said it was right, and I saw myself that it was right; but it was of no use; the more I tried, the worse it became, and so I gave it up. I thought it was only fair to tell mamma so, and then she shook me, and boxed my ears, and of course Tartar would not bear that."

"Clarissa, if you persist in your untruth, I must punish you."

"Very well, papa, I will be quite quiet, only don't let Tartar know."

"I mean that I must whip you—whip you severely, if I once take it in hand."

She quivered all over, for she was still trembling from her stepmother's vigorous treatment. "You will do it yourself?" she inquired imploringly.

"Certainly! Your mamma is too unwell to deal with you, and I should not allow a servant to chastise my daughter, unworthy though she be. But, Clarissa, I do not like it; I never yet laid my finger on a woman, or on a child; I hate what you compel me to. And you are your mother's daughter, as well as mine."

"If my own mamma were alive, she would know that I told the truth."

"You do but add to your guilt, Clarissa. Once more, will you confess, and humbly apologise? If you will, I

will at once take you to your mamma, and solicit pardon for you. *If not!—*"

"I cannot confess—I did *not* set the dog on. There! I will say no more. You won't believe me!"

"Indeed, I do not. Come with me." He took her by the wrist, gently enough, and led her to his own private sitting-room, locking the door behind him. Then he took down a small, slight dog-whip—not a formidable looking instrument of correction, certainly, nor one which could really injure the culprit; but it was capable of inflicting intensest pain. "It is my duty," he said gravely, as he drew the thin, supple thong through his fingers. "Clarissa, if I once begin, I shall not spare you. I don't mean to do this kind of thing again; I shall give you a lasting lesson, and it will be a very sharp one. But I concede you one more chance—*the last!*"

Clarissa made no reply; she looked unflinchingly at the whip, and wondered how much it would hurt.

"Take off your pinafore, and unfasten your frock at the top," said her father. "I shall whip you on your bare shoulders."

She obeyed, and the next instant she felt the sting of the lash, and winced, for she had not known how painful it would be. Her punishment was indeed a sharp one; it did not last long, but every blow told on the delicate flesh. She uttered no sound, nor moved; indeed, she held firmly on to the back of a chair, in the best possible position for the chastisement to take effect. She was just wondering if she could bear any more without crying out, when her father threw the whip into the fire. "There!" he said, "I hope you have had enough, Clarissa; I have had more than enough, I can assure you. I trust this will never occur again. As regards Tartar, you will have no chance; by this time he is dead and buried."

Then she broke out into passionate crying. "Yes," continued Lord Orwell, "and he owes his death to you! it was all your fault. I desired one of the gamekeepers to shoot him immediately. I could do nothing else."

He left her in an agony of tears, but as he opened the door, she lifted her head and exclaimed—"My own mamma, up in heaven, *knows* that I told the truth."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SON AND HEIR.

"Oh! hush thee, my baby! thy sire is a knight,
Thy mother a lady so lovely and bright!
The hills and the dales from these towers that I see,
They all shall belong, my sweet baby, to thee!"

ALMOST immediately after this unhappy event, which caused Clarissa deeper and more enduring grief than any one about her at all suspected, there were two arrivals at Orwell Castle, both of which, though differing widely in themselves, were to exercise a strong, lasting influence over her life.

First came a certain Madame Pierrot, an elderly Parisian lady, an undoubted gentlewoman, and what people call "good at heart," but undeniably cold, formal, and apparently unloving. She was not an injudicious person, for though warned that she would find her pupil one of the worst, and most vicious, and most impracticable of children, she took no notice of the kind monition, and behaved exactly as if she had heard nothing that was not altogether to Clarissa's credit. Had she been chosen earlier as Clarissa's preceptress, it is more than probable that the girl would have escaped many of her troubles.

Precise and methodical to the last degree, there was yet nothing irritating in her intercourse with her pupil, neither was there anything petty in herself or in her actions. She was strict, almost to severity, and required an unwavering obedience; but she was neither captious, morose, nor unjust. Clarissa quickly caught the idea that her governess was as rigid and as uncompromising towards herself as towards any other person; at all events, whether she liked the new *régime* or not, Clarissa was perfectly certain of receiving *justice* at the hands of Madame Pierrot. And to be sure of justice, to be sure of being treated irrespectively of moods and caprices, is a great boon to a reasonable child, or, indeed, to a pupil of any

age. Half the miseries of children and young people under authority, and more than half their faults, are due to the wayward, pernicious, though often unconscious injustice of those who bear rule over them.

And so it came to pass that Clarissa "got on," as nurse said, with Madame Pierrot; though all the while, poor child, a dull sense of unhappiness rested on her heart. The loss of Tartar and the severe chastisement she had received seemed to have subdued her entirely. She played no more pranks, she never sought the society of her beloved ghosts and fairy ladies—indeed, she did not for years set her foot in the dim corridor where she had once held her visionary court; and whether the haunted rooms were shut up, as the Countess had promised they should be, Clarissa did not know. She was at once too proud and too sick at heart to put the question.

Besides, she had now very little leisure at her disposal. She slept in the room adjoining the chamber of her governess, and she was visited the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning. She was required to rise at a fixed hour without fail, to take exercise for so long and no longer, to retire at the very moment prescribed, and over and above all other requirements she was expected to obey at a word, or even at a sign, and never on any account to oppose her own will or her own opinion, unasked, to that of her instructress. Finding her possessed of superior abilities, and willing, nay, even eager, to learn, Madame Pierrot gave her plenty to do in the way of study. Rather more than plenty, I am afraid, for she was kept too closely to her lessons, and frequently too much "pushed" for a child of her yet tender years. But the fact was that Madame Pierrot, though she knew her pupil's age to a day, continually lost sight of this piece of useful information. Clarissa's grave, controlled manner, her unchildlike sadness and reserve, her wonderfully retentive memory, her quick comprehension of what she read and studied, and, above all, the judgment she displayed when allowed to speak for herself, deceived too often her governess, who very seldom realised that she was dealing with a child under ten, and not with a young lady well on in her teens.

But while I am expatiating on my heroine's relations with her governess, I am forgetting to mention the second, and of course infinitely more important, arrival to which I have alluded. It was very shortly after Madame became an inmate of the Castle that the church bells were ringing again, and the villagers were making merry among themselves. One morning, nurse came as usual to dress her young lady, and she had evidently some great news to impart.

"Something has happened, Lady Clarissa, while you have been asleep; what do you think it is?"

"I cannot think," answered Clarissa, in her usual melancholy voice; "and I suppose I shall not mind. It cannot be that Tartar has come back again, because—because——"

"There now! don't cry, my darling! Not all the crying in the world will ever bring back them who are gone, whether they are dogs or human creatures. But *somebody* is come! Can't you guess?"

"No, I can't. I had rather not."

"Did nobody tell you you were going to have a little brother?"

"No; I never heard of it. Have I a brother, a real *live* brother? And shall I be allowed to love him?"

"Of course you will. It is quite right that sisters and brothers should love each other. I thought you would be pleased."

"I am not sure that I am pleased yet, but I will try to be. Is he nice? Have you seen him?"

"No; I have not seen him, but I have heard that he is a very fine, healthy baby, bigger than you were at three months old, Dr. Hammond says."

"When may I see him, nurse?" The sudden eagerness of the child delighted the good old woman, who mourned sincerely over her darling's sad subjection.

"That is more than I can say, my lady," she replied; "but they will be sure to send for you before long. Your papa is pleased beyond belief! He looks nearly as young and gay as he did when first he brought your own dear mamma home. There will be a fine christening before long."

"Is that why the bells are ringing?"

"Of course it is! Those bells always ring when there are births or marriages in the family. They rang when you were born. Why, that will be nine years ago come next April."

"I hope papa will love the baby," said Clarissa, softly.

"He is sure to love him; he is the son and heir, you know. He is Lord Fordham, and will one day be Earl of Orwell."

"Papa never loved me. He never 'took to me,' I once heard someone say."

"Oh, nonsense, my lady! You never could have heard any such thing. Of course, when my lord wanted a boy, and there came a girl, he was a good deal disappointed. And then you were not a fine child, and you cried, cried, cried. Deary me! how you did cry and wrangle the first two years of your poor little life! I thought you would never learn to walk; you could not stand alone when other children of your age could run and play about quite strong upon their legs. I was afraid you would never have your health, you dwined and fretted so, and cut every tooth with a fit of illness. But, thank God! you are pretty strong and well now, for all you are so little, and you are sound as sound, in spite of your sickly looks that do belie you! Country air and plenty of new milk and good nursing has done wonders."

At that moment Clarissa was called; Madame Pierrot was ready to read with her before breakfast; and, ere the book was closed, the Earl himself appeared, radiant with satisfaction. Madame congratulated him in her own language, and, after a short conversation touching the arrival of this ardently-desired son and heir, they both turned to Clarissa. Her father had not spoken to her since the day of her disgrace and punishment. He had told her that she was to consider herself in disgrace till she *confessed* her fault. And as she had not that to confess which he supposed she had, and as there was no probability of her "'fessing," Topsy-fashion, there seemed every prospect of her remaining under the ban of his displeasure for a long period of time, or—as Clarissa herself sadly thought—"for ever and ever in this world."

But the advent of the heir somehow wiped off old scores; it was only fitting that a general amnesty should be proclaimed, that all might rejoice together. And Clarissa comprehended that because her brother was born, she herself was to be restored to favour—that is to say, to as much favour as she had hitherto enjoyed. And she could not help feeling a little happier in consequence, though, as she told herself, “I shall never feel right till papa knows I don’t tell lies, and would not for all that he could give me.”

Lord Orwell, being in such high good humour with himself, his Countess, and his four hours old Viscount, condescended to evince an unusual interest in his daughter—even though she had disappointed him from the first moment of her birth. The baby and his mamma having been duly discussed, he bethought himself that the present was a good opportunity to make a few paternal inquiries respecting Clarissa, so he, with Madame’s permission, dismissed her to take a run upon the terrace.

“Are you satisfied with your pupil?” he asked, when he and the governess were left alone. “I want your candid opinion of Lady Clarissa, Madame.”

“I have scarcely been long enough with her ladyship to form an opinion worth expressing,” replied Madame. “She is naturally reserved, and I should say she is of a melancholy disposition; she never appears to have any idea of amusing herself like other children. At the same time, she gives me as little trouble as possible; she obeys, as it were, mechanically. I found her, and still find her, indulging in undesirable habits, but a single reproof generally, indeed, I may say *always*, suffices for its removal. So far, I have not seen in her any indications of the defiant and rebellious, and even malicious, spirit with which she is accredited.”

“You surprise me,” replied Lord Orwell; “no one, except old Nurse Barlow, who spoils her, has ever obtained the slightest influence over her. Even Mrs. Sweetapple, who has been in the house ever since I was born, and who is undoubtedly partial to Clarissa, made sad complaints a year ago, and declared that she washed her hands of her, and would not be responsible for so wayward, and head-

strong, and unmanageable a child. I expect she has some deep-laid scheme, whereby, in virtue of an apparent submission, she hopes to get the better of you."

"It may be so, certainly, but I do not think it; I do not perceive in her any tendency to deceit and cunning ways; on the contrary, she appears to me to speak the truth with a certain bluntness which requires correction. She is *brusque*, without being actually rude, and frank almost to impertinence."

"Oh, then she is impertinent?"

"I cannot say that she is. I do not allow her to answer when reproved, nor do I permit the expression of unmasked opinions. I keep to the good old ways, my lord; I cannot perceive the wisdom of the licence which the modern system of education, especially in this country, accords to young people. I am not unreasonable, but I am strict. I am not one to make allowances, and I seldom, or never, admit excuses. I exact prompt and invariable obedience, and I punish all deviation from duty. As yet, I have had no occasion to punish Lady Clarissa; whatever I have desired her to do she has done; whatever I have requested her to alter she has altered; in no single case has she attempted anything like arguing the point."

"I am really delighted to hear it! Your system must be an excellent one, since it produces such results. Perhaps the chastisement which I felt myself constrained to inflict a little while ago had something to do with her speedy reformation. She might have reflected—she does reflect, no doubt—that her days of untrammelled liberty being over, she had better relinquish the struggle, and turn over a new leaf, and so adapt herself to circumstances. Has she ever spoken to you of the correction?"

"Never! Except in answer to certain questions, she has never alluded to the life she led before I entered on my duties here. But the Countess told me the whole story on the evening of my arrival; and had she told me nothing, my own perceptions would have informed me. The marks of the whip are still visible on Lady Clarissa's shoulders."

The Earl coloured and winced, as well he might. He kept telling himself that he had done the right thing,

that he had performed his duty as a parent; nevertheless he perpetually wished that he had kept his hands off the tiresome child, and he almost swore to himself never again, on any account, to turn executioner, even though his wife should insist upon it. "Perhaps she has forgotten all about it," he said, scarcely thinking of his words.

"I should say Lady Clarissa never forgets," was Madame's answer. "A child of her temperament remembers only too vividly."

"But she really deserved all, and more than all, that was inflicted. She told me a lie, and obstinately persisted in it! Indeed, she has never to this hour retracted, or shown any sign of retracting. However, we will say no more about it. We will let bygones be bygones, and leave her to begin afresh, trusting that the alteration in her behaviour is sincere and permanent."

"One word, my lord. Excuse me, I pray you; but are you quite certain that Lady Clarissa was guilty of a deliberate falsehood?"

"Quite certain. Ruffles declares that she saw her give the signal which she knew would make the dog attack the Countess."

"Ruffles might have made a mistake; and, in any case, it is only her word against Lady Clarissa's."

"But Lady Orwell confirms the woman's statement."

"If Lady Orwell declares that it is so, there is, of course, no more to be said on the subject. But, had I been uninformed, the vice of falsehood is one of the last I should impute to Lady Clarissa. I should have fancied her rather glorying in her bold confession, and that at any cost of punishment! But I am mistaken, it seems; and, indeed, as I told your lordship at first, I do not at present feel myself competent to give any decided opinion on the merits or demerits of my pupil's disposition. I need not say that I shall continue to watch her closely. I shall permit no infraction of the rules which I have drawn up for her benefit; and I shall at once, and with a strong, unswerving hand, check the smallest symptom of insubordination."

"You will do wisely. I have every confidence in your

discretion. I leave my daughter entirely in your hands, Madame Pierrot."

"I thank you, my lord," replied the stately governess, with her lowliest reverence. "I think I may promise your lordship never to betray the trust which you are so good as to repose in me."

"I am perfectly easy on that point, Madame. I think you said Clarissa was tolerably quick at her lessons?"

"Remarkably so. She has superior abilities. Of that there is no question. She often astonishes me by the facility with which she masters a difficult lesson, and she understands so quickly. I have had many pupils—all of them young ladies of high rank—but I must avow that I never had the pleasure of instructing one who profited so quickly and so easily by my humble endeavours as Lady Clarissa Oakleigh."

"I always fancied she was rather clever, though for a long while she refused to learn even her letters. And you really have no fault to find with her?"

"The only fault she has displayed is a sort of dreamy sullenness, which makes her, in spite of her singular quickness of parts, very much like an automaton. But as she always immediately answers when spoken to, and in no disrespectful tone, and obeys promptly, if not with alacrity, I have judged it best to take no notice of this peculiarity. In fact, I should scarcely know in what terms to frame a reproof. I hope, ere long, my pupil will display a more cheerful spirit, and then—if she continue as she has begun—I shall not have the shadow of a complaint against her."

"You could not improve her complexion, I suppose?"

Madame Pierrot felt much inclined to laugh; but she replied, with all possible gravity, "I am afraid not, my lord. Interfering with nature commonly does more harm than good. I think her nurse gives her too much medicine, and I have interfered. I shall make her play at battledore and shuttlecock, and I have ordered a set of *Les Graces* from town. It is a game which tends to expand the chest, and improves the figure. Also I may remark that I have known very sallow, swarthy-skinned girls develop into very good-looking brunettes! I assure

your lordship that nothing shall be wanting in my endeavours to render Lady Clarissa physically, as well as mentally, worthy of her noble name and parentage."

An hour or two afterwards Clarissa, going to the music-room for some music which Madame required, met Ruffles, who stopped her to say, pertly, "Well, young lady! I suppose you have heard that your nose is put out of joint?"

Clarissa put her hand to the feature indicated, and gravely replied, "I think my nose is quite as usual, Ruffles!"

"You little idiot!" returned the uncourteous waiting-woman. "Or perhaps you're shamming simplicity; it's just like you! You can't be such a born fool as not to know what 'a nose put out of joint' means?"

"I do not know. Please to let me pass, Ruffles; Madame Pierrot is waiting for me."

"Oh, how good we are all of a sudden! It wouldn't keep its dear old governess waiting half a minute, would it? But, anyway, you know there's a young Viscount come to town, and he's the son and heir—the *son and heir*, I tell you! And you are just nowhere, my Lady Clarissa, for ugly, impudent, wicked little girls don't count for anything when there's a fine boy to inherit the title and estates! Especially when they are so dreadful wicked as to set dogs at people. It might have been the death of your dear, sweet ma, you see, to say nothing of the precious little Viscount; and if it had you would have been hung, my lady—yes, hung by your neck till you were dead! *dead!* DEAD! 'And may the Lord have mercy on your soul,' as the judge would have said, when he put the black cap on to pass sentence. You've had a narrow escape, I can tell you; and I only hope you'll learn a lesson and take warning. Though I believe you are natural bad; and I quite expect to be standing in front of Ipsley gaol, some fine morning, to see *you* hanged, Lady Clarissa!"

With a shriek and a shudder, almost amounting to a convulsion, Clarissa fled. It was some minutes before she recovered sufficient composure to find her way to the music-room, and, when there, she had to pause and collect

her scattered senses, poor child, before she could remember for which volume of *Handel* she was sent. She went back to the schoolroom very white and trembling, and with the wrong music-book after all.

"What is the matter, Lady Clarissa?" asked the governess, gravely composed, though thoroughly uneasy.

"I met Ruffles, and she was rude to me," was all the child's reply.

"What did she say?"

"*Must* I tell you? It hurts me to tell you."

"I know what is good for you, Lady Clarissa, better than you know yourself. I am waiting for your answer."

"She called me wicked and ugly, and said I might have been hanged, and that I would most likely be hanged some day at the county gaol."

"Please to explain. Why should you be hanged?"

Thus urged, Clarissa repeated, word for word, all that had passed between her and the waiting-woman. Madame asked a few plain questions, and Clarissa, though reluctant, answered them as plainly as they were put. Finally the governess said, "Now, Lady Clarissa, I want to know from you something with which I have really no concern, as it all happened before I ever saw you, and when I was in no way responsible for your behaviour. May I depend upon you to tell the truth?"

"*Yes!*" said Clarissa, shortly and emphatically.

"Did you or did you not set your dog at your step-mother, the Countess of Orwell?"

"I did *not*! But I did set him on Ruffles, though only to frighten her. And—and—I think I took Tartar to mamma's room to frighten *her*! I thought it was quite safe, and so it would have been if mamma had not beaten and shaken me. I did not even remember that Tartar was there, the shaking and boxing made me feel so queer; the first thing I knew was that he had flown at mamma, and knocked her down. If I had left him alone, he would have killed her perhaps, or hurt her dreadfully; but I managed to quiet him. And that is all."

And Madame Pierrot was perfectly convinced that that was all! She further asked, however, "What made you let the dog loose, contrary to orders?"

"I let him loose because I wanted him; he always was my very own dog. I wish I had not let him loose, for when I unchained him I killed him. But he knows now I did not mean him any harm."

"He knows *now*?"

"Yes! I *feel* that he knows! People say dogs and horses have no souls, but I know they have. And souls don't die; they go *somewhere*! So Tartar's soul knows that I loved him always. And mamma's soul knows that I said nothing but the truth."

"I feel sure you speak the truth, and unless you tell me a falsehood, or try in any way to deceive me, I shall believe every word you say," said Madame Pierrot quietly; "but you must not talk nonsense about animals having *souls*, for they have not any. Do you understand?"

"Yes," answered Clarissa meekly. But there was something in her mind which, though unexpressed, was almost identical with Galileo's celebrated "*ma pur si muove*," which he muttered after his public retraction of the earth's revolution, before the offended tribunal of the Holy Inquisition.

"What did Ruffles mean by my nose being put out of joint?" further asked Clarissa.

But Madame could not explain. This familiar and stupid English idiom was beyond her. She could only tell her pupil not to mind; it would certainly be something very foolish and very vulgar. But Madame came to the conclusion that she had undertaken a pupil quite unlike any former one, and that there was something in this noble household very much amiss. What she had seen of the Countess she did not like, and it struck her most forcibly that the Earl had very little affection for his daughter.

CHAPTER XV.

NOT JEALOUS.

"And things are not what they seem."

THE birth of the heir was duly celebrated, and he was christened with all honours when he was little more than three months old. He was what people generally commend as "a remarkably fine child!" That is to say, he was large, and fat, and strong, and looked about him as if quite aware of his own importance in the world upon which he had entered. But there Lord Fordham's personal perfections ended: he was not a handsome child; and, worse still, he bore the undisguised stamp of the plebeian race from which, on his mother's side, he sprang. To the Countess's infinite mortification he was not an Oakleigh either in feature or expression, and before she left her room she had recognised in her baby's countenance all the well-known traits of the Sparks family. By some unkind freak of nature—who is singularly uncomplacent in her moods sometimes—the little Viscount was the image of his deceased grandpapa Sparks, whose name he would probably never hear, and he strongly resembled a good many Sparkses, living down Whitechapel way, who were doubtless his lordship's grand-uncles, and grand-aunts, and third or fourth cousins, of whose very existence he would probably remain uninformed to his dying day.

Clarissa would have been very fond of him if she had been allowed; but on the plea that she might teach the baby her strange, naughty ways, she was almost excluded from the nursery. She and Madame Pierrot were still satisfied with each other, though as months rolled on there was but the slightest increase of familiarity between them. Madame never unbent, and Clarissa never broke through the system of reserve which she had practised ever since that eventful day when she bade adieu to Tartar and to

the ghosts in the upper story. She made rapid progress in all her studies, and when she was about twelve years old, she began to grow, and gradually lost the dwarfish appearance which caused some people to believe, and even to assert, that she was deformed. And nurse was thankful that her charge prospered, that she was comfortable, and even content, under the strict rule of her governess; but she was by no means certain that Madame Pierrot was the "*friend*" whom she had asked God to send the child. It was plain to her that the stately Frenchwoman had won Clarissa's esteem—and that was much; but that she had gained her heart she did not and could not believe. Probably Madame Pierrot would have been rather troubled than otherwise with the affections of her pupil, and if Clarissa had made any demonstrations, I think it is very likely that they would have been coldly and decidedly repelled.

Nurse still remained in office, as Lady Clarissa's own maid. The Countess tried in vain to oust her; she had her will in most things, and the household, whether at Orwell or in town, was entirely under her control, with one or two exceptions. And these exceptions were Mrs. Sweetapple and Mrs. Barlow, whom the Earl firmly declared should remain in his service, capable or incapable, as long as they lived, or at least till they chose to dismiss themselves. For two whole years Lady Orwell struggled to rid herself of these old retainers; but on that one point her husband was immovable. She yielded at last, but with the worst grace possible, and persisted in treating them—a sore grief to Mrs. Sweetapple—as already superannuated. She did not interfere with nurse, though Mrs. Ruffles and Mademoiselle Aline, the French maid, often did, knowing well that they would not be accountable to their mistress. But Sweetapple's faithful soul was grieved within her when a woman, whom she called in her vexation "a fine stuck-up London madam," arrived at the Castle, engaged by the Countess, nominally as her assistant, really as her supplanter. Henceforth Sweetapple's occupation was gone, and her post became the merest sinecure. Her sanctum was invaded, her privileges shared with a person who scarcely treated her with civility, her

arrangements laughed at and traversed, and her orders systematically disobeyed. At length she ceased altogether to issue them, and leaving the wainscoted parlour in which she had been sole mistress so many years, took up her abode with Nurse Barlow, in the old nursery-rooms, contenting herself with the superintendence of the house-linen, and certain services rendered with alacrity to Lady Clarissa and her governess.

Madame Pierrot and the Countess were so far friends that they never came to any kind of quarrel. But the shrewd Frenchwoman was not long in taking the measure of her patroness's mind and character. Knowing nothing of the family history or of the family politics, it was marvellous how soon she came to a right comprehension of both. She divined, even before she heard a whisper of the truth, that Lady Orwell had been married for her great wealth and for nothing else, and she judged that the Earl must have been in no ordinary difficulties before he could bring himself to so evident a *mésalliance*. They saw but little of each other, the Countess and the governess, for Madame lived, by choice, almost entirely with her pupil, and what they did see in no way tended to a mutual liking.

Though the widow of a commoner, Madame Pierrot, *née de Brècy*, was of ancient noble family; indeed she had always called herself de Brècy-Pierrot, before the trouble came which made her at once dependent on her own exertions and an exile from *la belle France*. Then she was too proud to make her boast of faded honours and an empty name. Madame had once figured at the Court of the unfortunate Marie Antoinette; she had witnessed the horrors of the revolution—it was even whispered that she herself had been doomed to the guillotine, and escaped as by miracle. No one knew whether this were so or not, for she never referred to that terrible epoch in her history, nor did any one know under what circumstances M. Pierrot had died. Madame only said that she was left a widow in her youth, and that all her property—save a few family jewels which she had contrived to secrete—was lost irretrievably. If anyone ever spoke to her of the dreadful scenes in which she had borne her part, she

at once desired to be excused from any reference to events which it was impossible to remember without overpowering anguish. And no one, not even the plebeian Countess, presumed to do otherwise than respect the feelings of so dignified a personage.

Lady Orwell, on her side, was well content that Madame Pierrot should continue to form one of the household. She could not have entirely neglected Clarissa without exposing herself to certain aspersions, and Madame saved her all trouble on this score. She told everybody that Madame was an excellent governess, and understood her pupil, and that she made it a point of conscience never to interfere. For which consideration both governess and pupil were undoubtedly thankful.

Clarissa and Madame were therefore happily left very much to their own devices; and it was well for the lonely and otherwise uncared-for child that she was not exposed, as might well have been the case, to the oppressions and evil example of an under-bred, unprincipled, cunning woman, who would have cared very little for her pupil, and sought only to butter her own bread by paying court to her uneducated patroness. All this Clarissa was spared, for Madame was conscientious as she was discreet, and high-minded as she was inflexible. Perhaps if she had evinced any affection for her pupil, Lady Orwell would have been so much displeased that she would quickly have found abundant reasons for dissolving the engagement. And that Madame was perfectly aware of this I think there can be little doubt.

Lord Orwell, as time passed on, was less and less at the Castle, where Clarissa and her governess invariably resided the whole year through. Sometimes the Countess was with him, but oftener he was in London or travelling without her. They were by no means happy in their conjugal relations, this ill-matched couple—and the Countess always considered herself to be a particularly ill-used woman. She had never ceased to be jealous of Clarissa's mother; though if she had known how, in those rooms in which she indulged her own ill-temper, the Countess Clarissa had pined and grieved over the alienation of her lord's affection, she might have been a little more reason-

able and a little less ridiculous than in her selfish and exacting spirit she too often was.

If not a devoted wife, she was a foolishly fond mother, and, though she knew it not, her spoiled, unruly brood were the torment and detestation of the servile menials about them. For she presented her husband with a numerous and healthy offspring; "the baby" became an institution, and was no longer a novelty, a son or daughter—and, on one occasion, a son *and* a daughter—being added to the family, pretty punctually, once a year. When Clarissa was fifteen she had four brothers and three sisters, and the Earl had long made up his mind that he had his quiver quite too full. Lord Fordham was received with raptures, and the Countess, as mother of the future Earl, became a person of the first importance, even to her unloving husband. She was highly to be commended in that she had given an heir to this ancient house, and my lord was not ungrateful.

And when the Honourable Augustus arrived just twelve months later than the Viscount, he, too, met with a very cordial reception; for, of course, where it is a question of succession, two direct heirs are better than one. But the Honourable Sydney John, had he known how coolly his advent was taken, might have considered that he had just grounds of complaint. He was barely fourteen months old when the Honourable Percival and the Lady Louisa Maria made their appearance, to the delight of the Countess and the ill-concealed chagrin of the noble Earl. And when another, and yet another, daughter were added to that noisy nursery, Lord Orwell became verily disgusted, and remarked to Dr. Hammond that he had no idea that the women of the lower orders were so absurdly given to maternity; but he supposed that was the reason why there were always such crowds of dirty little wretches in gutters and on doorsteps! It must be confessed that his lordship was rather difficult to please. The Countess Clarissa had annoyed him because she had one only child—a useless, ill-favoured girl, too! The Countess Louisa offended him by giving him seven vigorous, lusty olive-branches, who, in due season, would gather round about his table.

"But," said Louisa, when her youngest was born, and

she bitterly resented the worse than indifferent greeting accorded by the infant's father—"there is plenty for all! I am rich enough to bring up and endow five-and-twenty children without trenching upon the family estates, which, of course, must descend intact to my son, Lord Fordham. The more the merrier, I say!"

"I am glad your ladyship enjoys so much noise and discomfort," replied the Earl, politely; "but I—who always had a horror of a large family—must be excused if I absent myself a good deal from their charming society, and if I request—as a *favour*, of course!—that they may not be allowed to overrun the *whole* house when I am under the same roof. You must remember that the upper classes believe in *nurseries* as a practical institution—'the people,' I believe, do not hold with them. And the Oakleighs have never been a vulgarly large family. It is most unfortunate that they should now depart from their time-honoured habitudes."

I think, on the whole, the Countess had some excuse for her discontent. And yet, as Mr. Hadfield once told her, when she poured out her troubles in his ear, and plainly reproached him for having had a hand in her second marriage, she had really *all* for which she had bargained. She was Countess of Orwell; she was called "my lady" and "your ladyship!" Her eldest son was a viscount; her daughters were, as she expressed herself, "born ladyships;" she appeared at Court; her name held sway in the most aristocratic circles, and she revelled in all the delights of the London season, whenever the titled babies did not interfere with town engagements.

"And what more can your ladyship desire?" said Mr. Hadfield, when, upon one occasion, she had sent for him to "take instructions" which, though rather vague and wild, had reference to "a separate maintenance."

"What more can I want?" replied the angry Countess. "Why, a great deal more! You men always stand up for each other! Am I not slighted, neglected, vexed, despised? Was I not married for my money?"

"Most undoubtedly! And you married for your title and position. That was quite understood at the time. Lady Orwell, you and I have known each other a good

many years, and there is no reason why we should wear a disguise in our private and confidential interviews. I can help you most effectually by speaking plainly; you will best serve yourself and your own interests by a clear statement of the facts, or supposed facts, which have caused you so much disquietude. You know very well that affection had no part in the alliance which I had the pleasure of arranging between the Earl of Orwell and yourself. My lord wanted money, you wanted rank. He knew that you were a woman of obscure birth and antecedents, but of irreproachable respectability; had it been otherwise the union would not have been for a moment contemplated! You knew that he was sunk in debts and difficulties, from which there was no extrication, save by his obtaining an immense sum of money, such as marriage with a wealthy woman alone could secure to him. His rank and ancient pedigree were little or nothing to him, if he became an exile and a beggar, comparatively speaking! Your overflowing coffers were little or nothing to you, as a mere woman of the people, with no place in society. You could give what he most urgently required. He could give what you most earnestly sighed for. Was it not a fair equivalent? At least, you thought so at the time, and you were willing—nay, more, you were anxious—to enter into the compact upon the terms proposed. Was it not so, Lady Orwell?—I was going to say, Mrs. Shrosbery.”

“It is not very generous of you to remind me of my past weakness,” said the lady, with a sullen countenance, and a sigh that might have been audible in the adjoining room.

“What weakness?” quietly asked the lawyer.

“The weakness of giving myself and my money to one whom I knew never loved me.”

“Whom you *then* knew did not love you! Forgive me, but if Lord Orwell *never* loved you, if he has not loved you since you became his wife, and the mother of his children, it is surely your own fault. What is all this about? What is the matter? And what do you want?”

“I want a divorce!” said Louisa, savagely. Now at that time the law of divorce was shamefully one-sided;

the husband could easily rid himself of the guilty wife, or even of the wife whom, as a matter of expediency, he assumed to be guilty. But the guilty husband, as far as the law was concerned, was a fixture for life; and the wife who was wronged could only negotiate for a separation, legal or otherwise. Therefore Mr. Hadfield looked gravely at his client, and replied—"I am grieved—shocked, indeed! I thought the widow of my old friend Shrosbery was to be trusted."

"What do you mean?"

Then Mr. Hadfield explained, and after a little more conversation Louisa understood the situation.

"I see," she said; "my husband can divorce me if I deserve it—or, if he can make it appear that I deserve it! But I cannot divorce him, should his infidelity be patent to the world."

"In such case you could scarcely fail of obtaining a separation on favourable terms."

"Very well! I shall try for that."

"Think well what you do, Lady Orwell. Of what do you accuse the Earl?"

"Of nothing in particular; but of a great deal generally."

Mr. Hadfield burst out laughing. "That won't do," he said; "but you relieve me! I was really afraid that there was some ground for scandal. Can you not manage to give me some idea of the 'great deal generally'?"

"Lord Orwell does not confide in me as he ought to do; he does not talk to me as he talks to other women."

"What other women? Be definite, or hold your peace."

"Several! Mrs. Grahame, Mrs. Hammond, our doctor's wife here, Lady Helen Stuart, and even Clarissa's governess, Madame Pierrot; but especially Mrs. Grahame!"

"Who is Mrs. Grahame?"

"She is a widow lady—I do detest widows!—who lives across the park, just on the verge of the village. Her husband was a great friend of Lord Orwell's."

"And what does she do to excite your jealousy?"

Louisa flared up at once. "Jealous! I jealous! no, indeed! I respect myself too much for that, I hope. Whatever I am, I am *not* jealous, Mr. Hadfield."

"I am glad to hear it; it must be such an unpleasant state of mind. But I never yet knew a jealous woman own to the impeachment. Is Mrs. Grahame young and handsome?"

"Oh, no; not so much younger than I am. And, certainly—though it sounds vain—certainly not so handsome."

"Is she in love with him, then, or he with her?"

"Neither, of course. Do you suppose my husband would be in love with any woman but his wife?"

"From my knowledge of Lord Orwell, I should say *not*. But your words implied something of the sort. What is it, then?"

"He talks to her about things I don't understand. When he is in town he talks to Lady Helen Stuart, who is fifty if she is an hour, and a regular fright, and dresses so ill! They talk about books I have never read or heard of; about debates in Parliament that I know nothing of; about discoveries in science that no one believes in. Now I think men should talk only to their own wives, and they should only talk of things that please and interest them. That is my idea of matrimony!"

"And if that is your ladyship's idea, I really do not wonder that Orwell and yourself are not better friends. My lady, I cannot interfere in any way; you have no more right to 'separate maintenance' than my wife has, and she, dear old soul, never dreamed of such a thing! But you can separate by mutual agreement, *if you like*, on grounds of 'incompatability of temper.' But I warn you that it would be most inexpedient; neither law nor society would be on your side; you would expose yourself to a thousand unpleasantnesses, and you would have to renounce the companionship of your children, as soon as they had passed the age of infancy, if not before."

"Then I won't be 'separated.' I did not mean it, you know. I only wanted to frighten Orwell."

Mr. Hadfield went away, feeling very cross and dissatisfied with himself. He felt that he had done wrong in making this "*alliance*" between two people who cared little or nothing for each other. "Never again," said he

to his wife, "will I have a hand in such another business. You never approved of it."

"No," she answered, gently; "because I thought that such a marriage, for mere convenience' sake, was little better—was, in fact, *a sin* in the eyes of Almighty God."

CHAPTER XVI.

LATE REPENTANCE.

"But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

THE Countess took Mr. Hadfield's advice, and said no more about "a separate maintenance." Though matters were in no wise mended between her and her noble husband—he absenting himself more and more frequently, and for increasingly prolonged periods from home; and she resenting, by every means in her power, the slights, both real and imaginary, from which she suffered.

It was in the spring of the year which witnessed Clarissa's fifteenth birthday, that the Earl and Countess went up to town together, in orthodox Darby and Joan fashion. The Countess had been unavoidably detained at Orwell, for several years in succession, by her maternal cares, and the Earl had consequently expatiated alone during the season, which he made last from early in February till the close of July, when it was high time to be thinking about the moors, and making arrangements for sundry shooting parties. At the termination of the last London season the Countess had wished to accompany her lord into Scotland, on a grouse-shooting expedition; but he declined the pleasure of her society, on the ground that the friend whom he was about to visit was a bachelor, and that no ladies were expected; that the box was a mere rough Highland cabin, altogether unfitted for the

reception of the gentler sex, and that the party were going in for vigorous sport and nothing else, and could not be encumbered with the care of wives or sweethearts !

Of course, Lady Orwell was compelled to submit, though with a very bad grace. She said little, however, but made certain private inquiries, and was not long in finding out that nearly all the gentlemen assembled at Borsland Tower were accompanied by their wives, that several young ladies were chaperoned by the matrons, and that the Tower, though situated in a desolate and wild region, was really a noble residence, celebrated for its luxurious appointments, and for the lavish hospitality of its wealthy owner, who, though himself unwed, was a veritable squire of dames, and loved nothing better than to find himself surrounded by the fair, to whose delight he could never sufficiently administer. It may be better imagined than described how wroth the Countess became when she had acquainted herself with these facts ; but no words could paint her passionate displeasure when, at the appointed time in September, her lord neither returned nor gave any report of his proceedings. It was quite by chance that she learned he was enjoying himself with a few choice spirits in some Ultima Thule of which she had never heard before, and, later still, that he was in Paris, and in society of which she strongly disapproved. You will readily understand that when my lord did at last put in a tardy appearance, just before Christmas, he received a rather doubtful sort of welcome, and had somewhat more than the traditional *mauvais quart d'heure* in which to bewail his iniquities and his shortcomings, and enjoyed the privilege of listening to rather more than the customary allowance of curtain-lectures awarded to unsatisfactory husbands.

In February the last child of this ill-matched pair was born, and the Countess, having recovered with her usual rapidity, made speedy preparations for an ensuing London campaign. She was scarcely so handsome as when she stood at the altar of St. James' on that freezing January morning. She had grown, as her lord had prophesied, stout and ponderous, her complexion was decidedly florid, and her hair, if she had not taken measures to darken it, would have been what she herself described as "grey as

a badger." But art sometimes triumphs over nature, and a fashionable lady, with no lack of money, and an adroit *dame de toilette*, may work wonders by the aid of a few simple adjuncts, which the initiated know how to employ effectually. And the Countess "made up" judiciously, not too extensively, and with consummate skill, so that she passed muster very well, provided that her dress became her, that the light was not too strong, and that nothing happened to ruffle her temper, or disturb her equanimity. For she looked both old and ugly when she was offended, or, as she was fond of saying, "*affronted*." And she was so easily affronted that her good looks too often suffered total eclipse.

The Earl would willingly have left her behind at Orwell: he was tired of country life himself, and longed for the haunts of Mayfair, for the bachelor luxuries of his club, for his lounge in Bond Street, for his canter in the Park, for a thousand pleasant things which are only to be found in London, and found in their perfection only during the London season. But he could very well have dispensed with the companionship of his wife, her society being in no way essential to his happiness; rather, on the contrary, a weariness and perpetual source of annoyance and vexation. Up to the last he hoped against hope that something might occur to keep her safe at Orwell. He went into her boudoir one afternoon as she was superintending the packing of her jewel-case, resolved to try what a little expostulation would do, and, if that did not answer, to tell her very plainly that he thought her right place was at home among the children, rather than in West End drawing-rooms, surrounded by cunning admirers and false friends, who were ready enough to profit by her free-handed hospitality, while they secretly laughed at her bad style and her want of gentle breeding.

"I want to speak to you, my lady," said his lordship, as he entered; "send your women away."

"Is it very important?" she asked, with that air of affected languor which she carefully practised, as being essentially *haut ton*.

"Of course I have something to say, or I should not

take the trouble of coming to this end of the corridors," was his rejoinder.

"Very well; but you see I am very busy! Leave those things"—(to the maids)—"and put out all my morning-gowns in the dressing-room, that I may see them altogether, and decide which of them I shall take to town. I expect they are every one too *outré* to be worn." Then to the Earl, as the waiting-women disappeared—"Now, my lord, whatever is it? I have really very little time to spare, and will thank you to be brief."

"As brief as you will! I came here to ask you if all this packing and arranging are in earnest? Are you absolutely thinking of going up to town this season, Louisa?"

Louisa opened wide her eyes and stared in undisguised astonishment. "Whatever do you mean?" she inquired at length, with such genuine surprise in look and tone that the Earl scarcely knew how to word his answer.

"Mean?" he in his turn interrogated. "Why! I mean just simply what I say. I spoke quite plainly, I thought."

"So plainly that I feel convinced I misunderstood you. It seems to me that you are asking to be told what you know very well already, and what you have known for weeks past! You might as well inquire whether I expect to go to bed to-night, or whether I intend to dine presently!"

"Dining and going to bed are part of the ordinary daily programme of one's life. Leaving the country for town is quite another affair. I repeat the question, Are you actually determined to spend this spring in London?"

"I am determined! Pray, have you any objections to offer?"

"Five hundred! But it will be sufficient to name two or three of them. I think it unwise to risk your health, for you are far from strong, and the baby is not six weeks old."

"You are like that stupid fellow in Young's 'Night Thoughts;' or is it Knight's 'Young Thoughts'? I never can remember! You take 'no note of time'! Our darling baby is exactly ten weeks old, and I am as strong and well as I ever was in my life. It is something new

for you to be concerned about *my* health; but you must excuse me if I don't feel quite as grateful as you might expect. You would not mind if I died to-morrow, and then you could marry your dear Mrs. Grahame."

"Louisa! I did not come here to talk nonsense, and worse than nonsense! We will not, if you please, discuss Mrs. Grahame at present. I think you take great liberties with the name of an excellent and admirable lady."

"Oh yes! Of course *she* is admirable! *She* is charming! *She* is divine, no doubt! As to '*excellent*'—well, I should not like to say!"

"Louisa, if you talk in that strain I must leave you; and if I leave you, it will be to give orders to have my yacht in readiness by this day week. It is utterly unworthy of you, this absurd and vulgar jealousy. Once more I repeat the question, Is it your sober intention to go up to town the day after to-morrow?"

"And once more I assure you that it is, and that I am not by any means to be turned from my purpose. My health, I assure you, is just now extremely good, and I am much stronger than when I entered upon my last campaign four years ago. It is very kind of you—most considerate; but you may lay aside all anxiety on my behalf."

"How can you find it in your heart to leave that infant?"

"I have provided a thoroughly trustworthy and eligible nurse. The whole nursery staff, indeed, is to be depended on. The children will receive every attention, and Mrs. Morris will write full particulars three times a week."

"Mrs. Morris, forsooth! That woman never tells the truth except by accident. I really think she would lie by preference, even though the truth best served her turn. To gain her own ends, to feather her own nest, to save herself all possible trouble, is all that she concerns herself about. However, if you choose to abandon your offspring to the tender mercies of unprincipled hirelings, that is your affair. They will have bad times while you are figuring away yonder—poor little wretches!"

"You speak as if they were no children of yours."

"They are my children, certainly, worse luck ! I never expected to have such a plain-featured, plebeian-looking, common-place brood about me, claiming me as their father. But children of their years are always supposed to be their mother's care, and I must say I think you do quite wrong to leave them."

"You talk as if I were a petty tradesman's wife," she returned angrily. "One would suppose I was always in the nursery myself, with one small nurse-girl to help with the bigger children. What's the use of having a lot of servants, at unheard-of wages, if you can't make them entirely responsible ? And Mrs. Morris is a most exemplary woman, most devoted to me and to baby, most respectful ; she knows how to behave to her superiors !"

"She knows how to toady and befool her mistress. And I am glad I am not the baby, that is all."

"Well ! since you are uneasy about the children—I did not know you cared twopence for any of them, except Fordham and Augustus—the best way will be to take them with us. There is plenty of room at the top of that great rambling house ; the servants must pack a little closer, that is all."

"Take them with us ! " cried his lordship, who had not foreseen this possibility. "Not if I know it, my lady ! I won't be shut up in a town house with seven spoiled, unruly, unmanageable brats. I'll see them all at Jericho first, or go there myself ! If you had them in anything like order it might be done, though I still say nothing could be worse for the children than London air, used as they are to a pure country atmosphere. Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park would be a poor exchange for our own breezy domains, as far as they are concerned. No ! I put my veto on that ! The children stay at Orwell, and I require you to stay with them, and do your duty as a mother."

"You are most unreasonable, most unkind ! " pouted the Countess ; "it is four years since I had a bit of enjoyment, and now you grudge me a few weeks in my proper sphere. But it's of no use ; I've made up my mind, and go I will ! I didn't marry you and give you such heaps of money to rust down in the country, from year to year, and

look after my children, as if I couldn't afford to pay the proper people to look after them. I didn't sacrifice my liberty and my wealth for *this*, I can tell you! I married you, Lord Orwell, to be a Countess, and to enjoy myself accordingly, not to be a poor, dragged, shut-up mother, no better than a nurse."

Lord Orwell shuddered, for his lady invariably pronounced nurse as "*nuss*," and it grated naturally upon his patrician ears. She also, when at all excited, talked volubly about her "proper spear!" It was clearly useless to declaim further, or continue to expostulate. Nothing but force would keep her from London, and it would be only waste of breath to carry on the discussion, which was fast developing into an open quarrel. And the Earl never quarrelled if he could possibly avoid it—that is to say, he never, or at least very rarely, condescended to a downright fight of words. When it appeared that an ebullition was inevitable, he generally shut his ears and walked away, whither the Countess dared not follow—for of late years he had rigidly preserved the privacy of his own rooms.

He went away now, leaving the Countess to fret and fume, and to feel herself thoroughly "affronted," but as firmly resolved as ever on following out her plans. And we must admit that there was very little reason why she should not accompany her lord; nor can we for a moment believe in the sudden access of paternal solicitude with which, apparently, he was seized. Her ladyship was quite right—he cared only for his two eldest sons; for his *heir*, and for the next in succession, supposing the young Viscount should never arrive at man's estate. As for the five younger children, he really regretted their existence, and if any sudden malady had swept them all away he would scarcely have mourned, except in that outward seeming which decorum required.

He went now to his private library, where no one ever ventured to intrude on him, and, throwing himself back in his easy chair, gave way to his chagrin.

"What have I gained?" he asked himself, as, lost in bitter thought, he reflected on his present situation; "what have I actually gained by this most unequal, most unsuitable, most mortifying marriage? I have preserved

my estates, my position, my reputation, perhaps; and I have an heir of my own blood, though that might have followed upon a marriage with a woman of my own rank—a woman of birth and breeding, of whom, in society, I should not be involuntarily ashamed. But, then, no lady of my own order had so much money as this woman of the people; or, having a large fortune, would consent to bestow it upon a beggared spendthrift, reduced to his last extremity! When a man is necessitated to selling himself, he cannot afford to be too particular as to the price. I have heard of heiresses with humps; now Louisa has not a hump, and when I married her she had a certain coarse kind of beauty, which, however, has coarsened considerably since we became man and wife. She makes up very well, I must confess though—as well as if she had served an apprenticeship to the beautifying trade. And she is no fool—perhaps I could manage her better if she were! And yet I don't know! John Talbot married a fool, and though she never said a sensible thing, he could do literally nothing with her. She could give no reason for anything, but she was doggedly obstinate, and would return again and again to the point, as stupidly and illogically and perversely as possible, but still persistently, till at length, out of utter weariness, poor John was fain to hold his peace. I might have done worse, I suppose. Louisa gave me her fortune, and it set me free, and afforded me the means wherewith to enjoy my life; and life without plenty of ready money is really not worth having. In return I bestowed upon her a title and a position, and just as much of myself as I could not well withhold. But the real Francis Oakleigh—Clarissa's husband—she has never possessed, and never will. She knows no more of *him* than she knows of any other man with whom she is on speaking terms. And perhaps I don't know her? Perhaps that old soap-boiler, her 'dear old Peter,' as she perpetually calls him, knew her better? He said she was a good wife to him, and I dare say she was; they were to a great extent in harmony, and that, I suppose, is the true desideratum of married life—husband and wife, if they are to find happiness in each other, *must harmonise*, although of different temperaments and

tastes. Well! I have had more diversity of matrimonial experience than falls to the lot of most men. I have married, or rather was married, for family; I have married for love and beauty; and, finally, I have married for money. And—God forgive me!—it was for nothing but money. If the widow Shrosbery had only had a moderate dower, or if it had been securely tied upon her, I should no more have dreamed of marrying her than of taking to my bosom a cinder-wench. In fact, I should never have married again at all had it not been for those confounded debts, and my inextricable embarrassments. I had to choose between beggary and outlawry and the fair Louisa with her golden charms, and she seemed to me by far the lesser evil. Ah! if only I could have secured the money-bags without the widow! but that, of course, was an impossibility. I suppose the only thing that remains is to make the best of my sordid bargain. And I suppose my lady must go up to town, and play the *grande dame* to the extent of her ability.”

Here he paused, and mused awhile still more sadly. Then he unlocked a small writing-desk which was near at hand, and took from it the ivory miniature likeness of his wife Clarissa, which he had shown to Louisa on the evening of their arrival at Orwell. It had long been removed from the drawing-room; though the oil painting in the dining-room still kept its place, in spite of all the Countess's attempts to banish it to her step-daughter's rooms, or to any rooms which she herself seldom entered. I think, if she could have had her will, the beautiful picture would have found its place with the lumber and dust of the deserted, haunted garrets.

Lord Orwell reverently opened the morocco case, and from the faded satin lining looked forth upon him the lovely youthful face, with its sweet pensive eyes, and its perfect lineaments, and soft and tender smile. Long and mournfully he contemplated the exquisite features. He knew now how cruelly he had neglected this gentle, sensitive creature, who had loved him with all the depths of her true, pure, womanly nature. How unselfish had been her affection, how patiently she had borne his coldness, his caprice and desertion; how bright was the smile

that ever greeted him after his longest absences—that beautiful, radiant smile, so full of love and trust and peace! Scarcely had a word of even implied reproach fallen from those tenderly-curved, rose-red lips, and never had a murmur been uttered by them in his hearing. Those glorious eyes had sometimes looked mournfully and through tears into his, when they were parting for an indefinite period; but they shone with all the unutterable joy of full content when, at last, they met again. Nemesis comes slowly in many cases, but, sooner or later, is sure to lay her heavy hand upon the guilty one, and arrest his careless steps.

The Nemesis of a vain repentance struck now at Lord Orwell's inmost heart. He was tired—or, at that moment, he *felt* tired—of the world's empty, unsatisfying pleasures; a sense of utter desolation came suddenly upon him. He was alone—quite alone—with the memory of the wife whom he had loved passionately, but selfishly, and whom, as conscience told him, he had cruelly deserted, even when lingering decay and the hand of death itself was upon her.

“Oh, my darling, my dove!” he cried, as he gazed into the pictured face; “how cruel I was to you! But I never thought—indeed, I did not!—that you would really go away and leave me. And yet—yet—I know that I helped to lay you in the grave that hides you from my sight. Selfish brute that I was! Oh, if that time might but come over again—if I might have you once more, my dear love, how I would cherish you! how I would nurse you myself! how I would watch and tend you till the bloom of health came once more to your wan cheeks! Oh, you were so good, so sweet, my poor lost Clarissa! You never vexed me with petty, vulgar jealousies, as *she* does! Foolish woman! as if the man who had once loved you, Clarissa, could ever have any other love, lawful or unlawful! Not all the charms of Helen of Troy, not all the radiant grace of Euphrosyne, not all the intellect of Minerva, could rekindle the flame of love in my dead heart; but friendship is sweet and precious; the true friendship of such a woman as Marian Grahame is a treasure indeed, and I will not, for fifty jealous, exacting

Louisas, give it up. For, you know, Clarissa—if the dead know all, as I sometimes think and hope they do—those we call the dead, who are living on, blest and glorified in other worlds!—you know, my one love, that Marian Grahame is my friend, my true and faithful friend, and Ronald's faithful *wife*; though he, too, has passed away to that shadowy land beyond the grave."

And then he bethought himself suddenly of the Clarissa who yet remained to him—his lost Clarissa's child and his own, and again conscience smote him sternly. As he had neglected the mother, he had neglected the daughter; he had listened to Louisa's representations of her character, to her complaints of the girl's sullenness, and obstinacy, and insolence, and haughty, rebellious pride. Of late—for some years, indeed—he had thought little about her, he had spent as little time as possible at Orwell, and he had seldom visited the remote apartments in which Madame Pierrot and her pupil lived. They never on any occasion joined the family circle. Visitors at the Castle scarcely knew that Lord Orwell had a daughter by his previous marriage; or, if they by accident discovered her existence, they were generally called upon to condole with the Countess in her misfortune in being burdened with a totally unsatisfactory and unpresentable step-daughter.

"How old is Clarissa?" Lord Orwell asked himself. He had to count back the years before he could satisfy himself on that point. "She is fifteen," he said at last; "growing up into a young woman! How time runs away! This very evening I will go and see Clarissa; I will neglect my eldest daughter no longer. Now, then, for those letters which must go by the next mail."

CHAPTER XVII.

UNEXPECTED, BUT DELIGHTFUL.

"Oh, that those lips had language! Life has passed
With me but roughly since I heard thee last.
Those lips are thine—thy own sweet smiles I see."

THE Earl had seen so little of his eldest daughter, that now, when he contemplated paying her a visit in her own apartments, she seemed to him almost a stranger. Clarissa and her governess had lived their own life in the east wing year after year; Lord Orwell had himself on several occasions requested Madame Pierrot to spend her evenings in the drawing-room, and once—once only—she had complied. The Countess manifested so much *hauteur* and ill-temper, and was so evidently annoyed at the conversation between herself and the Earl in French, that she resolved never more to expose herself to similar unpleasantnesses. Against Clarissa's appearance in public, her stepmother had always strenuously protested; girls were better kept entirely in the background, she averred—especially girls who were naturally forward and disobedient, and given to insolent self-assertion. Besides, Lady Clarissa was so very strange that there was no saying what people might think of her; in fact, there was no knowing what she might deem proper to say or to do, if one of her wayward moods came over her!

It so happened that, beyond meeting his daughter accidentally for a moment or so, he had not seen her for nearly eighteen months. As he remembered this fact, he could not but take shame to himself, and resolve that for the future he would evince some interest in the child who had been left to him by the wife he loved. The six-o'clock-dinner being over, and the Countess having retired with the "affronted" air, which was fast becoming her ordinary expression, he left the table, and at once proceeded to the schoolroom, where Clarissa lived. For a wonder he found her alone, Madame having gone early to

bed with a bad headache. Clarissa looked up surprised when he made his unexpected entry.

"Madame is gone to bed very poorly," she began to explain, as her father came up to the table where she was seated, busy with her crayons and pencils. It never occurred to her that his visit could be solely, or even chiefly, to herself; and she even felt a little frightened at the idea of receiving him alone. But what was her astonishment when he drew her towards him, and kissed her affectionately, replying, "Never mind Madame; I came to see you, Clarissa. How you are grown, and how much you are improved!"

Clarissa could scarcely believe that she was wide-awake. Never, in all her life, had he kissed her but coldly, and as a matter of form; never had he spoken to her in that kindly, familiar tone. What could it portend? What did it mean? And was she not dreaming one of her customary day-dreams? But the girl was too well-bred, too thoroughly a patrician, to manifest openly her profound astonishment. The Countess, under similar circumstances, would have freely expressed in word and gesture her wild amazement, for she had entered upon polite life too late to learn the sublime lessons of self-control which came quite naturally to her despised step-daughter. The Earl, however, noticed the inward agitation, and at the same time admired the matchless self-possession of Clarissa. He was glad to perceive that one woman of his family would know now to behave herself, and still more he rejoiced to discern in his daughter those innate signs of self-government and reticence, without which Madame's training would never have perfectly succeeded. "Come, now!" he said presently, "let us talk freely! Tell me all about yourself, Clarissa!"

But that it was not in her power to do. Her whole life long there had been a great gulf fixed between her surviving parent and herself, and she could not at a moment's notice overleap it, or even cross the bridge which he so hastily and abruptly threw over it for her benefit. She could not realise the truth of her present position. Her words would not come; her lips seemed closed, her tongue fettered. Besides, what could she say

about herself that he would care to know? Nothing ever happened; it was indeed with her, the "trivial round, the common task." The rule of her life was unvarying; she rose at her appointed hour, she dressed, she walked, she studied, she practised, she drew, she rendered unquestioning obedience to her governess. What was there in all this to describe? What was there that could possibly interest any living creature? He too well understood her perplexity, and he chid himself, not her, that there should be this icy barrier between them. He could only hope that it was not too late, that the barrier was not absolutely impenetrable.

"What are you doing?" he asked, as the readiest way of setting her, in some measure, free from the overpowering restraint, at the same time stretching out his hand towards her drawing-board.

"I am finishing a sketch I took at Barleswood, last September," she replied. "I had prepared my lessons for to-morrow, and Madame gave me permission to spend my evening as I chose, provided I did not sit up after nine o'clock."

"Is that your regular bedtime?"

"Yes; Madame insists particularly on early hours; I must retire at nine precisely, and be in bed at half-past, when my candle is taken away. And nurse and Sweetie both say this is good for me; and they talk about 'beauty-sleep'—only, I have not any beauty; and I am afraid never shall have any, even if I go to bed at eight o'clock all my life, and rise soon enough in the morning to wash my face with the dew, which they tell me is an infallible cosmetic."

"You are very well," the Earl answered; "you are greatly improved in looks! You will never, perhaps, be an accredited beauty; beauties are rare, and they grow rarer every year. At this moment, I do not know any woman, in any rank, one-half so lovely as your own mother. No! you will never be anything like her; you take after my family. But you have her eyes! they are just the same colour, and have just the same expression! Eyes such as yours would redeem far worse features from anything like plainness. I wonder I never noticed

them before! And now I come to observe you closely, I perceive that you have a look of her somewhere about the mouth. I am glad that Madame is wise enough to insist on early and regular hours. Now let me look at your drawing. Did you do this yourself, Clarissa?"

"Certainly I did. Madame never touches my drawings. But I can do far better than that; I could not quite catch the perspective, and I know this bit of foreground is rather out of drawing. I should have laid it aside, only Madame has made it a rule that I shall finish to the best of my ability everything which I once commence."

"An excellent rule, child! I wish someone had made and enforced such a rule, for my benefit, when I was a boy. I should have been less of a weathercock than I have been, always to my own undoing. But I think I am learning a little wisdom at last. It is never too late to mend, you know. Now, then, as to this drawing. I am not unacquainted with the rules of art, and I see at a glance that it is faulty; still, it is not a bad sketch. Nay; it is a very good one—clear, spirited, and delicately touched, such as very few girls at your age, and having had so few advantages, would produce."

She looked pleased. A glow of satisfaction tinged her generally colourless cheeks, her eyes brightened, her whole face lightened up, so sweet were words of appreciation from lips whence she least expected them. She looked for the moment positively handsome.

"I had no idea you could draw like this," he continued. "Will you let me look through your portfolio?"

She brought it silently, half pleased and half frightened—there were some things in it which Madame had never seen, and of which she might, perhaps, have disapproved; she watched her father, as one by one he examined the drawings, some in pencil, some in water-colours, some in chalks, and some in simple sepia. She need not have been afraid; Lord Orwell was delighted, for though no artist himself, he had the true artistic tastes and instincts, and he knew the fine points of a drawing, and could discern the blemishes at a glance. His criticisms, equally with his praises, gave Clarissa confidence, and soon she began to feel at her ease on this theme, which

was evidently one of mutual interest, and she talked fast and intelligently.

"It seems to me, papa," she said, when her tongue was quite unloosened, and she could express herself freely and without reserve, "that there is a point at which drawing—painting, rather—becomes poetry; also there is a point at which poetry becomes painting. Is it not so?"

"I suppose it is. I am sure it is; though I believe I have never fairly considered the subject. But what has led you to this conclusion?"

"Nothing in particular, only when I read *some* poetry, I feel that I could put it upon canvas, if I had the power. And I *can* put it upon drawing-paper, to please myself—and I am rather hard to please, I think! And now and then I look at paintings, and I feel as if I wanted to put them into verse."

"But you have seen no paintings, child?"

"I have seen and studied our own. There is one in the grand gallery that I have tried to copy in water-colours—Madame permitted me to try it—she says it is a *Claude*; it is a vintage scene, and there is such a lovely purple and golden haze over all but just the foreground. Madame says that one often does see such beautiful distances in Italy, and in the south of France, especially in the Vaucluse; and I have myself seen something like it, only paler and fainter, on our own river, in fine summer evenings. Then there is that little Rembrandt in the octagon parlour; I have copied that, too. Here it is. Oh! if I had only *oils*, instead of water-colours!"

"You shall have them, and you shall have lessons! Such a talent as yours ought to be cultivated. It is time you came out of your shell a little; you are fifteen, are you not?"

"In three weeks I shall be fifteen."

"I must have some talk with Madame Pierrot. She has nothing further to teach you in the way of drawing, I am sure. Ah! what is this?"

"Don't you see, papa? it is a copy of the portrait in the great dining-room. I did so want to have a likeness of mamma for my very own. So, when the Countess was at the seaside last summer, I got Madame to let me copy it. Is it good?"

"It is excellent! You shall do one for me for my dressing-room. You have caught the exact expression! That is just your mother's peculiarly sweet smile."

And Lord Orwell sighed as he thought how many of those lovely smiles he had missed, and how often they must have given place to tears—tears of which he was the only cause. Once more he turned to his daughter:—"How about your music? do you play as well as you draw?"

"No, I do not," she answered, ingenuously. "I think I have not the same insight into harmony that I have into drawing. I *feel* lights, and shades, and colours more than tones and semitones. But I practise regularly, and Madame takes care that I shall only study the best compositions. I like sacred music best—Haydn and Handel, particularly the latter; and Mozart, and Beethoven, and Gluck. I am afraid I do not care for Corelli."

"And you speak French, of course?"

"Oh, yes! I seldom speak anything else. And I have been learning Italian for the last year; it is extremely easy. But Madame does not pretend to speak it fluently. She translates, however, freely, and very soon we are to read *Tasso* together."

"You ought to have masters; you are of an age now to appreciate the best teaching."

"But there are none here, are there?—only the funny little old Frenchman at Ipsley, who comes to see Madame now and then. She always calls him Monsieur le Comte; and she says he was once lord of a fine old *château*, and the owner of large estates on the Loire; but the dreadful Revolution came, and he saw his only son perish on the scaffold, and his wife died of grief, and he himself with difficulty escaped the vengeance of Robespierre. He saved his life only, not any part of his large fortune, which was all confiscated; and ever since he came to England he has maintained himself by teaching French, chiefly in ladies' schools. And there are music-masters, too, at Ipsley, now I think of it—one of them comes once a week to teach Miss Hammond to play the organ."

"I am not speaking of Ipsley masters, but of London masters. I should like you to have the very best instruction."

"London masters! Oh, papa! But then I should have to go to London. The masters could not spare the time to come here."

"Certainly not! I never thought of such a thing! It is high time you saw something more of life than Orwell affords. You have been shut up too long."

"I have been to Ipsley, you know. And I have seen the beautiful minster-church there. And Madame says she thinks we might get as far as Oldcliff this summer. I do so long to see the sea."

"Do you mean to say you have never yet beheld the sea?"

"I have seen where the river widens at Hunsleigh, but that is only the estuary. I want to see the real wide German Ocean. Oh, I should like to see the Mediterranean Sea, and foreign countries! But for the present I should only think myself too happy to visit London."

"We will think about it. I should wish you to have every possible advantage; I will talk to Madame Pierrot to-morrow."

After some further conversation, the Earl rose to depart, and as he took leave of Clarissa she suddenly grasped his hand, and with a strange flutter at her heart, said, "Papa, there is one thing I want to say to you. I have wanted to say it for years."

Lord Orwell reseated himself. "Say it, then, my dear," he responded encouragingly, expecting some simple, girlish request.

"It is about poor Tartar, papa, who lost his life through my naughtiness; and it is about myself too. Do you—do you still believe that I told you a lie when I said I did not set the dog at the Countess? I shall never be happy till you do believe me."

The Earl's countenance changed; the remembrance of that day had always been to him peculiarly painful. The woman Ruffles had been discharged long ago, for certain malpractices, including a great deal of low cunning and unscrupulous deceit; and, worse still, he had discovered that his wife, though not a deliberate falsifier, could not always be trusted to speak unvarnished truth. She probably convinced herself that things really were as it suited

her ends to represent them, but she was not particular to convey the exact impression which integrity and honour demanded; nor did she hesitate to keep silence when a few words would have explained the mystery, and cleared the character of one wrongfully accused. No one knew this better than the Earl himself; he knew now that Louisa could, under certain circumstances, prevaricate to a considerable extent, and that she could say a good deal which would not bear investigation. His heart smote him—and it had smitten him many times before—as he recalled his severity to Clarissa; he could only answer, “If you say so *now*, Clarissa, of course I believe you! I suppose I ought to have taken your word in the first instance, but children are not always to be trusted, you know.”

“I was always to be trusted for speaking the truth. We Oakleighs could not degrade ourselves by falsehood. I tell you, once more, papa, on the word of an Oakleigh, that I was as innocent of setting that dog on Lady Orwell as you were! Of course, it was very naughty of me to take Tartar into mamma’s room, well knowing, as I did, how much she was afraid of him, and how thoroughly he disliked her. I believe I meant to annoy her, and I was not sorry to perceive that she was frightened; but I had such perfect confidence in my own power over the animal, that I could not imagine any harm would happen. And if she had not shaken me, and struck me, I feel sure that nothing untoward would have occurred. It was madness to touch me while Tartar was by. I confess that I was disobedient in every way, for it was ordered that he should be kept chained up, and, above all, that he never should be suffered to come into Lady Orwell’s presence. I confess, too, that I was impertinent—that altogether I was in a very naughty frame of mind. But that was all! I spoke the truth then as now. I was innocent of the crime for which I was punished.”

“I believe you, my dear; and I wish I had believed you then. I wish I had not punished you.”

“Oh, never mind that; that was nothing compared with the pain of being reproached as a liar—and by you, papa! But it is all over now, and you trust my word. If only poor Tartar were not dead!”

"Suppose I should tell you he was, as far as I know, still alive?"

"Oh, papa! but it cannot be. You had him shot—and all through me."

"I gave orders for him to be shot; but, luckily, the groom could not find him anywhere. So when I inquired if the execution had taken place, and found that it had not, I resolved that he should be sent away to a distance; for I liked the animal myself, and wished to save his life. Colin, who was one of the few persons he would follow, received his instructions, and Tartar's sentence of death was commuted to perpetual banishment. He went to some one I knew in the north of England, and soon became a great favourite with his new master."

"That is why I could never find out where he was buried. My dear old dog! I am so glad I did not kill him; I always felt as if I had been his murderer. But I do wonder he never came back again."

"I was very much afraid he would; in which case his life might have been unavoidably forfeited. I saw the poor fellow about two years ago, and he was ready to devour me in his ecstasy of joy. He would not look at his present owner as long as I remained in the house."

"Oh, if I could see him! But no; I think I would rather not; it would break my heart to leave him again, and to know that he was another person's dog."

Clarissa had never felt so happy in her life as when her father left her that evening. The interview had been so unexpected, so sweet, so confidential, that she could hardly persuade herself that she was not dreaming. For once she was disobedient, and involuntarily broke rules, through not hearing or not heeding the clock when it struck nine. She lingered in the place where she had said "good-night;" she played abstractedly with her pencils, all unconscious of the flight of time, and lost in a rapturous reverie. It was almost ten when it occurred to her to look at her watch, and then she hurried to her room, anxious to infringe no longer than possible, but feeling certain that Madame would willingly accept her apologies in the morning.

Clarissa went to bed in the happiest frame of mind—

may, she was so happy that she could not fall asleep as usual, but lay thinking of her father's kindness, of his promise of better instruction, of poor old Tartar, living far away in some mysterious region in the North, and of her mother, whose eyes she had, and of whom her father spoke so tenderly and reverently, till the grey dawn began to creep in through the window-blinds, and the night shadows fled away. And then she slept soundly, and awoke to find that it was a brilliant spring morning, and to hear nurse calling her, as she was already very late, and would scarcely be dressed in time for breakfast.

An hour or two later, the Earl sent for Madame Pierrot, and Clarissa took her morning walk on the terraces alone. Lord Orwell begged Madame to excuse him, inasmuch as he had requested her attendance instead of waiting on her in the east wing; but he particularly wished to converse with her in his own sitting-room, where they would be secure from interruption.

"For," he added, "I want to speak to you about my daughter; I have delayed too long. Is not the time come for some kind of change? Should she not have the best masters, as other young ladies of her age and rank generally have?"

"Your lordship has simply forestalled me in this matter," replied Madame Pierrot. "I have several times wished to speak to you on the subject of Lady Clarissa's future, but I was unwilling to intrude. In fact, I only waited till she was fifteen, and then I meant to address you, either personally or by letter."

"You are satisfied with her general conduct, and with her progress in her studies?"

"With both; I have no fault to find with my pupil. She is most obedient and conscientiously diligent. Her nature is essentially reserved, but exceedingly truthful, and she is the soul of honour. As to purely intellectual characteristics, I must confess she has a grasp of mind with which I can only partially deal. She wants to learn a great many things of which I know little or nothing. Mere surface knowledge does not satisfy her; she is intensely thorough, and always in earnest. She will despise the fair shams and specious shows that satisfy

most young ladies; nothing but realities will serve Lady Clarissa."

"That is as it should be. I am heartily sick myself of make-believes. She speaks French quite fluently, she tells me."

"As well as I speak it myself," answered Madame, with evident pride. "We are now reading *Racine* together. Her accent and intonation are perfect. I am teaching her Italian, of which, however, I do not profess to be mistress, though I can render *Tasso* very fairly into French and English, and can do *Dante*, in the least difficult parts, tolerably. Lady Clarissa wishes to learn Latin, and we are studying the Eton Grammar together. She plays the piano well, but not brilliantly; in fact, her playing is more remarkable for its taste and correctness, than for its execution. She ought to have a good music-master, for I have taught her all that I know myself, and my style and touch are, I am well aware, of a day gone by. I think she spoke to you about her drawing, for which she has, I believe, something more than talent?"

"I looked through her portfolio, which contains undoubted evidences of actual genius. For a mere girl in the schoolroom, who has studied only nature, and two or three good works of art, her productions are marvellous. I have promised her every advantage in this respect."

"I am most happy to hear it, and Clarissa herself will be delighted. She will amply repay any amount of care bestowed upon her."

"How soon can you be ready to go up to town?"

"In a few days. I never make much difference in my own toilet, and Lady Clarissa's dresses can be remodelled in London. Indeed, if I may be pardoned for saying so, I think her ladyship's wardrobe requires complete renovation; her attire is scarcely that which becomes the eldest daughter of the Earl of Orwell, though she be a girl still in the schoolroom. During the last two years Lady Clarissa has grown rapidly, and the child's costume scarcely befits the tall slim maiden of fifteen."

"It shall be attended to. In fact, Madame, I think you had better attend to it yourself. Your judgment and taste are alike unimpeachable; therefore I shall thank you to

give all necessary orders for your pupil, and send in the bills to me. We shall, or rather, you will, if you approve, remain in town till the autumn, and then I propose that you should go to Brighton. Clarissa tells me that she has never seen the sea. I could hardly credit my ears; I thought you all went with the Countess to Orsmouth, and to Scalby?"

"All excepting Lady Clarissa and myself. We remained at home; but I took advantage of the beautiful summer weather to accompany my pupil to Ipsley, and to Hunsleigh Port. I could not well compass more, and I feared lest I should be supposed to be taking too much on my sole responsibility."

"In future we will try to understand each other better. For the present, I shall feel obliged by your making all requisite preparations for this day week."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE COUNTESS AT HOME.

"If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly."

ALL this was very well, and the Earl experienced the happy glow of feeling which ever attends virtuous resolves; but the worst was yet to come. That Clarissa should go to London, and receive the best instruction, and enjoy such advantages as a nobleman's daughter may reasonably expect to fall to her share, he was thoroughly determined; and Lord Orwell could upon occasion, as those about him could scarcely fail to know, be very much and persistently in earnest when he had once made up his mind. But how would the Countess receive the information, which he must perforce impart to her, and that without any loss of time? for in twenty-four hours they would be on their way to the metropolis. For a moment he was

half inclined to leave her to make the inevitable discovery; but it was only for a moment that the idea of this craven policy prevailed. He was not at heart a coward, though, like many other men who have placed themselves in false positions, he was sometimes fain to sacrifice a good deal for the sake of peace and quietness. It would not be fair to Clarissa or to her governess to leave either of them to make explanations, or to expose them to that fire of questions and cross-questions to which he had himself so decided an objection. For the first time for many years the Earl resolved to lay aside all personal considerations, and to do his duty, however disagreeable it might be. And that it would prove *excessively* disagreeable he could not doubt. He had had many and varied experiences of his lady's humours, when a stronger will was opposed to hers; and that she would be "affronted" now, beyond all precedent, was no more than he expected.

"I'll go and do it at once," he said to himself; "I'll go now while the mood is upon me, and before my courage wanes. When a double tooth *must* come out, it is the wisest plan to resort immediately to your dentist; delay only aggravates your pains, and heightens the horrors of anticipation; I'll get it over at once. A pretty sharp fight we shall have; but Clarissa shall enjoy her rights. Now, then, to face the Gorgon!"

And without further procrastination, the Earl set off for the morning room, where he supposed his wife, at that hour, might be found. As he approached this room, which was at the end of a long corridor, his ears were assailed by a most tremendous uproar, that grew louder and louder as he advanced. When he reached the door, he paused, and listened in dismay. Had "Bedlam" broken loose? Had a party of frantic lunatics invaded the ancient domains of Orwell? What was the matter?—what *could* have occurred to cause such shrieks and yells and horrid howls? Another moment, however, convinced him that "the children" were holding mad carnival out of bounds, and that their mamma was sanctioning by her presence their noisy demonstrations, worthy of the infants of St. Giles' and Field Lane.

He opened the door, but no one heard him enter. His wife sat at her desk, writing an elaborate epistle on hot-pressed, perfumed, rose-tinted paper, apparently insensible to the wild clamour of her unruly flock. Lord Fordham and his brother Augustus were engaged in pugilistic encounter, and the Honourable Mr. Oakleigh was evidently getting the worst of it; the Honourable Sydney John was vigorously thumping Lady Louisa Maria, who had gobbled up her brother's share of sweetmeats as well as her own, and her small ladyship was defending herself as well as she could with her finger-nails, and shrieking like an excited Indian rushing on his foe, while the boy, between the blows and scratches, called loudly on his mother to interfere. Lady Selina sat on the floor crying over a broken toy, as only spoiled children with strong lungs and acrid tempers can cry. The baby yelled in her cradle, another child was playing with the fireirons, two small dogs barked wildly, and a parrot in a gilded cage was alternately inquiring, "Now, what's the row?" and adding to the concert by screaming at the top of her shrill voice.

"Is this Bedlam or Babel, or both combined?" asked his lordship, in angry disgust. Lady Orwell saw her husband, and dropped her gold pen upon the rose-hued page, as she strove vainly to reduce her noisy brood to order.

"Now, Fordham, I won't have it!" said her ladyship, in the mildest of tones. "Augustus, I'm ashamed of you fighting your elder brother. Have done, I say!"

Augustus, whose back was turned to his father, only replied by a well-planted blow between the young Viscount's eyes—a blow well worthy of an embryo prize-fighter! It has been rumoured that one or two of the Sparks family in a former generation were celebrated for their proficiency in "the noble art of self-defence;" so perhaps the young gentleman's prowess and talent were an inheritance!

"Oh, you wicked children!" screamed the Countess, as the blood flowed copiously from the swelled nose of the young heir. "You shocking boys! you are just like Cain and Abel, and you'll come to the same bad end as Cain, Augustus! You'll be hanged!"

"Cain wasn't hanged!" shouted Augustus, scarcely pausing, and collecting himself for a powerful back-hander. But at that moment he was seized in the rear by his father, who first shook him angrily, and then administered a few smart cuffs that elicited from the sufferer a succession of infuriated howls and kicks. At the same instant Sydney John and Maria Louisa tumbled over into the fender, Selina roared, the baby appeared to be going into fits, the child at play with the fireirons fell over Sydney John and Maria Louisa, Polly jumped into her swing, and whistled a tune in her most piercing voice, and the two dogs, coming somehow to grief, in the *melée*, fell upon each other tooth and claw, and added to the general chorus.

The Earl seized the bell-rope, and pulled it till it broke. A footman hastily appeared, looking scared and irresolute; the man, hearing the clamour, and the prolonged tintinnabulation, naturally imagined that the room was in flames, and all the children burning. "Take these brats away!" shouted the Earl, trying to make himself heard above the general uproar. "And send the nurses to carry off these squalling babies." The servant picked up the two youngest boys, and bore them away, struggling and protesting, one under each arm. The two elder ones, having received further paternal correction, set up a fearful lamentation, and the baby became purple in the face. The dogs were kicked out of the room, Polly got a smart rap on her pate, which sent her down, in sullen silence, to the bottom of her cage, and in a few minutes arrived several women, headed by the paragon Morris, by whose combined efforts the room was at last cleared—the wailings and shriekings becoming fainter and fainter as the victims were borne towards their own quarters, till at last they became wholly inaudible beyond the double baize-covered doors, which shut in the nurseries. And then Lord Orwell turned sternly to his wife—"Louisa, I am ashamed of you."

"What have I to do with it?" exclaimed Louisa, with an injured air. "Children will quarrel, and they will make a noise! It's their nature to, and it does them good."

"Does them good to indulge in savage tempers, to fight like baby-champions of the ring! You were wrong when you likened them to Cain and Abel—they are just a couple of young Cains; and was there ever such a small virago as that child, Maria Louisa? I saw her dig her nails into Sydney's cheeks. However, they shall have a good whipping presently, all round, every Jack and Jill of them, except the baby, and she shall have a double dose of *Dalby's*, or whatever you call the narcotic."

"I am ashamed of *you*, Orwell," replied the Countess, with a curious mixture of sulkiness and mock dignity. "You don't deserve to be the father of such fine, promising children, you don't; and you didn't ought to be a father at all, you didn't!" she continued, lapsing insensibly into the genuine Sparks' vernacular, as she always did when her anger was forcibly excited. "And I won't have them whipped, poor dear lambs. I won't have them touched, breaking their fine spirits and spoiling their tempers."

"Judging from what I have just witnessed, I should say their tempers are past spoiling. But seriously, Louisa, can't you keep them in a little better order? I never in my life heard such a hullabaloo! A regular Walpurgis Night! A mother ought to have some control over her children, surely!"

"Pray don't suppose I cannot make them mind me if I choose," returned the Countess, at once "affronted" at the implied censure. It was a tender point with her, as her people knew; she always protested that she could and would enforce obedience, and at the same time found herself systematically disobeyed by the young rebels, whom she constantly apostrophised as her own "lambs." She would have given a good deal that the Earl should not have put in an appearance at that most unlucky moment, for she was obliged to acknowledge to herself that the "lambs" were really behaving with most unlamblike ferocity, and that her "pretty dears" were neither looking nor comporting themselves at all prettily! Nevertheless, she continued to maintain her position, accusing her husband of unnatural severity, and declaring that the darlings, from Lord Fordham down to the baby, were

terrified at the very sound of his voice, and that "I'll tell papa of you!" was the most effectual threat current in the nurseries.

"I am quite content to be an ogre if my name has a salutary effect," returned Lord Orwell. "But, Louisa, I came here expecting to find you alone. I wanted to tell you that I mean Clarissa to go to town this season!"

"Clarissa go to town!" almost shrieked her ladyship incredulously. "That she shall not! A child like her go out, indeed! People would think we were both crazed."

"I said nothing about her going out. I was not thinking of her introduction to society. I don't approve of girls making their *début* too early, and I intend that Clarissa shall remain in the schoolroom until she is almost eighteen." He spoke with so much quiet decision that the Countess was involuntarily silenced.

"I don't understand you," she said at length. "What, then, do you purpose by taking the girl to town?"

"I propose to give her the best masters. I feel that I have too long neglected my eldest daughter, who evidently regards me with affection, and who gives promise of very superior qualities of mind. She has talents that will amply repay due cultivation."

The Countess was very angry; but she had the good sense to control herself, knowing that nothing was to be gained by vituperation. She answered very coolly, "As to talents, I never heard that she had any; and you acknowledge yourself that Madame Pierrot is an excellent governess. Why make any change? Is it not more prudent to leave well alone?"

"I do not contemplate any change as far as Madame is concerned. I only wish to supplement her instructions by those of masters. You ought to know by this time that young ladies of family invariably complete their education under competent professors. And Clarissa is no longer a child, and is, moreover, as Madame Pierrot assures me, well advanced in her studies."

"You have spoken to Madame Pierrot on the subject?" she asked hastily, changing colour as she spoke. Nothing annoyed her more than to discover that any person was consulted or informed before herself. She was possessed

with a very curious and troublesome jealousy on this point; and to find out that anything was going on which had not been previously confided to her was to fill her with the most serious indignation and distress of mind. To use her own phrase, she was sure to be *affronted*! And when she was affronted she made herself disagreeable to all about her, and peculiarly so to her husband, who in nine cases out of ten was the offender.

"Naturally," replied Lord Orwell. "To whom else could I have spoken? Who else knows anything about Clarissa?"

"I think *I* might have been consulted! It seems to me that I am nobody and nothing in my own family. I am continually being slighted in this way."

"Do be reasonable, Louisa! Is it not in the very fitness of things that I should take some small interest in my eldest daughter's welfare? Ought I not to acquaint myself with her progress? And have I not come straight to you from Madame Pierrot?"

"But you went first to her! You should have mentioned your idea to me before you spoke to her. It is not for Madame Pierrot to decide what shall be, and what shall not, under my roof!"

"It was I, not Madame, who decided; I merely wished to ascertain from her whether Clarissa's education was sufficiently advanced for her to profit by further advantages. And I am satisfied that she has just reached that point where a little change is highly desirable. It is, therefore, *une chose arrangée* that Clarissa goes to town."

"A shows—*what*?"

"I beg your pardon. I forgot that your knowledge of French was so limited. I meant to say that it was a settled affair—that——"

"But it is not a settled affair!" interrupted the Countess angrily; "and what is more, I will not have that girl with me in town on any terms."

"You need not see more of her than you do here. There is the old schoolroom, which can be fitted up for Madame and Clarissa. They will live there, of course; they will in no wise interfere with your arrangements. Clarissa will be very busy with her masters, and I shall

wish Madame to take her to different places of historical note, and to show her some of the works of art which abound in London."

"I don't see that girls require so much education. I suppose you are anxious about Clarissa because she is so very plain, and therefore not likely to marry. Your blue-stockings are generally ugly enough."

"I do not wish her to become what is vulgarly called a 'blue-stocking.' I only desire that she shall receive the education to which by birth and position she is entitled; it is positive cruelty and injustice to withhold from a child any possible advantage in the way of instruction."

"Perhaps you intend her to go out as a governess?"

"What do you mean, madam? No daughter of my house ever yet worked for a living."

"Nevertheless, Clarissa may. Suppose you died to-morrow! Do you think I would keep her—a girl who has always treated me injuriously, and whose influence over my own sweet children I dread beyond expression? She would have to turn out pretty quickly, I can tell you; and, as far as I can ascertain, *her* mother had not a brass penny to her fortune! I suppose it was a case of 'my face is my fortune, sir, she said.'"

"I am glad your ladyship speaks so candidly. You remind me of what I had almost forgotten. I will give Mr. Hadfield instructions as soon as we arrive in town."

"Instructions about what?"

"About a proper provision for Clarissa. Your own children will be amply provided for. The title and estates descend, of course, to Fordham. Swaffdale, which is your own dower-house, goes to Augustus, and the marriage settlement takes care of the younger ones. Clarissa alone is portionless."

"And so you will portion her with *my* money? A very fair proceeding truly, when I have brought you seven children, your lawful and natural heirs."

"Clarissa is as naturally and lawfully my heir as any of her brothers and sisters. Of course, in a legal point of view, Fordham, as my eldest son, is my heir. But I was using the word in its broadest sense; I meant to observe

that Clarissa's rights to a future provision were inalienable."

"But all the money you have is mine."

"I beg your pardon! All the money *you* have is mine! The husband holds his own; the wife holds nothing, but from her husband! There is your settlement, of course, with which I neither can nor will interfere. But you must recollect that a very large sum was paid over to my bankers, on the occasion of our marriage, and that part of it went to redeem the encumbered estates, while the remainder continued at my own disposal. On any other terms, you had never been Countess of Orwell! You force me to say what is ungallant; but truth is truth."

"I wonder you are not ashamed to make such admissions."

"I am ashamed! And yet, at this moment, I do not see what else I could have done, situated as I was. And I never supposed you would display so much temper, and turn out a jealous and exacting wife. However, I did not deceive you any more than you deceived me. I never pretended to be in love with you, and I knew that you were in love with my title and rank only. Why should we reproach each other now? Why should we not make the best of what remains to us? I wish you to go your own way, and do exactly as you like; and I claim for myself equal privileges. I never was, and never will be, a hen-pecked husband."

"I don't want to hen-peck you! Hen-pecking is shocking bad taste. But I won't be a slighted, neglected wife; I have a spirit of my own, and I won't meekly submit to be ignored. And, to come to the point, I won't have your termagant daughter, Clarissa, with me in town. And if you leave any of my money to her, I will dispute it to the utmost farthing. And that's the long and short of it!"

"Louisa, why will you provoke me beyond endurance? It seems to me you are actually seeking a bitter quarrel. Have a care! If you say much more I will leave you, never to return. I will take Clarissa with me, and you shall not be troubled with either of us any more."

At which threat, by no means a novel one—only Clarissa's

name had never before been involved—the Countess burst into passionate tears, and bewailed her unhappy fate. Doubtless she was pained, but one cannot feel much sympathy with her distress, since all her vexations, all her petty jealousies, all her matrimonial troubles of every kind, arose not from wounded love, but from self-love; not from disappointed affection, but from bad temper and a mean, exacting spirit. And she suffered far more from imaginary slights than from actual wrongs, as in the present case—her mind being chiefly disturbed by the fact that Lord Orwell had consulted the governess before herself. If he had come to her in the first instance, he might have won from her a reluctant consent to his project; but now she was firmly resolved that she would never yield the point. If he persisted, there should be open war between them. So far, she had disliked and despised Clarissa purely on account of the old grudge, and because she was her mother's daughter; but now that the Earl gave evidence of his affection for her, she became suddenly and unreasonably jealous; and Clarissa was hated with a double hatred.

Lord Orwell was extremely annoyed. He could not bear to disappoint Clarissa by telling her that, after all her expectations, she must remain as usual at the Castle. Also, he winced under the sense of being conquered by his wife; also, his judgment told him that with such a woman submission was fatal. If for peace' sake he yielded now and then an inch, she would ever after demand, and probably attain, *an ell*! Of course he could set her at defiance, but, to do him justice, he did not prefer that course of action. And then she might, and certainly would, revenge herself on the innocent cause of her displeasure. Clarissa, after all, would be the victim, to say nothing of Madame, who would probably not put up with my lady's freaks of humour, if they assumed a serious shape. For Madame could be offended, though not so easily as the Countess could be affronted. At length a brilliant idea struck him, and once more he hastened to his wife's boudoir, and found her, as she declared, extremely unwell from "violent nervous headache."

"I am sorry to disturb you, then," he said; "but I think I see a way to split the difference between us. I wonder I did not think of it before. Of course, you will go up to town to-morrow, with as many servants as you require, and take the children with you, if you wish it. I will remain here for a few days longer, and then go direct to Paris with Clarissa and Madame. Paris will do quite as well as London for Clarissa; and Madame will be delighted to revisit her native country. That will do very nicely, will it not? We shall each please ourselves, and there will be no clashing anywhere!"

But this was the cruelest wrong of all! If he could not feel the devotion he ought to feel towards his lady, at least he need not publish his indifference to the world by taking up his abode in Paris for the season, and leaving her to go out alone in London, in the equivocal position of a deserted wife! It is needless to say another scene ensued, and Lord Orwell quitted the apartment in deeper disgrace than ever.

But the Countess, left to her own reflections, began to fear that she had gone a little too far, and that she must somehow come to a speedy compromise. She was no favourite with her fashionable friends; there were plenty who would rejoice over her discomfiture, and talk scandal about her and the Earl, if they spent the season apart in different countries. And she was terribly afraid of the *on dits* of "Mrs. Grundy."

Late that evening the Earl received a brief note from his wife. If he would give up the Paris scheme, and go with her on the morrow to town, in proper Darby-and-Joan fashion, she would consent to Clarissa and her governess joining them at the time he had appointed. He at once accepted terms, and went himself to the Countess to express his satisfaction. And so a treaty of peace, or at least a *truce*, was concluded there and then between them.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MORNING OF SURPRISES.

"For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."—LUKE XV. 24.

CLARISSA lived a very secluded life in London. She studied with Madame, she took lessons from several masters, and she visited all the art galleries and exhibitions of that day; but she never on any occasion joined in the festivities in which her stepmother freely indulged; nor was she ever seen, except accidentally, by any of her father's guests. Yet she was extremely happy, happier than she had ever been in all her life, or so, at least, she fancied. She saw beautiful pictures, which she was permitted to examine at her leisure; she was taken to the Tower, to Westminster Abbey, to St. Paul's, and to all such public buildings as were connected with national history either past or present, and nearly every morning, while all the fashionable world was asleep, she enjoyed her walk in Kensington Gardens or the parks. Nor was that all; her father, though he did not often visit her apartments, was invariably kind and even affectionate when they did meet, and he showed by many trifling attentions that she was by no means forgotten, and that he was taking real interest in the progress of her education.

Madame Pierrot also enjoyed herself, and appreciated to the full the change which she had long desired. Nor was she insensible to the pleasure of superintending her pupil's toilet, and she took great pains in order that Clarissa should make a suitable appearance. For it was quite time, as she told the girl, that she learned how to dress; anybody could wear clothes, but there was a certain art in dressing which few Englishwomen ever understood, and which could only be communicated by a Frenchwoman of a certain rank. At the same time, Madame had the discretion, as well as the good taste, to

provide for her young lady only the simplest and plainest of costumes; she dressed her just as a girl in the school-room should be dressed, partly because an elegant simplicity was decidedly her *forte*, and partly because she deprecated the interference and invidious criticisms of the Countess if she should discern any startling alterations in Clarissa's outward arraying.

Nevertheless, her ladyship did greatly demur to the fact that her step-daughter's dresses were new, and of excellent material, and also of regulation length—the truth being that she greatly objected to Clarissa's aristocratic air and style; she could not disguise from herself that the girl, though no beauty, was every inch an earl's daughter—"the daughter of a hundred earls," if it came to that! while she strove in vain to convince herself that she looked a countess, "to the manner born." Alas! when she contemplated her own image in the glass, in spite of all her goodly raiment, in spite of silks, and satins, and costly lace, and jewels that were a fortune in themselves, there was always the widow Shrosbery confronting her, instead of Lady Orwell. Worse still, there were visions now and then of Louisa Sparks, as she appeared in the old Whitechapel days, only stouter, redder, and a thousand times more self-confident!

One morning Clarissa had quite a double adventure. She had been with Madame to her dressmaker's, and afterwards, remembering that there were some fresh pictures of note being exhibited in a gallery close at hand, she expressed her wish to see them. Madame had no objection; on the contrary, she was glad to give her pupil every opportunity while the town sojourn lasted, for the Earl had warned her that she must not rely upon its speedy repetition. She therefore responded with alacrity, and gave orders to drive to Hanover Square, where the paintings were on private view; they were already furnished by the Earl himself with the requisite tickets of admission.

There were many more pictures than they had expected, but as they had dismissed the carriage, intending to walk home, they were in no hurry to leave the rooms in which they found so much well worthy of their attention. They

stayed, indeed, much longer than they had intended, the time slipping by without their being at all aware of it, and it was Clarissa who at length proposed that they should take one last hasty survey, and then leave the place. This final glance, however, occupied a full half-hour, and the gallery—for it was now the height of the season, and the middle of the day—had become tolerably crowded. Clarissa was intently contemplating a beautiful landscape of the Claude school, which reminded her of the river at Orwell after a fine summer sunset, when she was startled by a sudden grasp, or clutch rather, which Madame gave at her arm, and turned to find her *chaperone* deadly pale, and so agitated as to be unable to stand without support.

"Dear Madame, you are ill!" exclaimed Clarissa. "How thoughtless I have been, dragging you about all the morning! and you said at breakfast time you were not feeling very well. Let us go into the little room at the end, while you recover yourself, and I will request one of the porters downstairs to call a coach."

But Madame turned still paler, and trembled visibly, while the only reply she gave was: "*Mon Dieu! O mon Dieu! Est il possible?*"

"Is what possible?" asked Clarissa, greatly frightened; for Madame, unlike the generality of her countrywomen, was by no means prone to call lightly or casually on the Holy Name. She would not say "*Mon Dieu!*" in that tone, and with that look, without some very strong cause for her emotion. "Dear Madame," again pleaded Clarissa, "do tell me what distresses you!"

"It is he! it is he!" she faintly murmured, her head sinking on Clarissa's shoulder; "it is *my husband!* It is his ghost!—for he, my beloved Henri, died years ago upon the scaffold! He comes to warn me that my days on earth draw to their close."

Really alarmed, Clarissa looked about her for some assistance, but it so happened that all the company were congregated at the other end of the long room, and no one was near them except some gentlemen, to whom the girl hesitated to appeal. And yet, sustain Madame's weight much longer she could not, and the poor old lady, as it seemed to her, was talking quite deliriously. Though

quite contrary to the punctilious maxims of propriety with which Clarissa had been carefully imbued, she was almost constrained to speak to the gentleman nearest to her, when she saw a young lady, with an elderly attendant, coming rapidly towards the place where they were standing.

"Is the lady ill? Can my maid and I be of any service?" asked the stranger, as soon as she perceived that something unusual was occurring.

"Oh, yes!—thank you, yes!" replied Lady Clarissa, eagerly; "if you only would——if you would be so very kind as to help me to get Madame to that little room further on, where nobody scarcely comes."

"Certainly!" said the young lady, promptly, offering her arm; "and you, Bridget, take the other side." Then to Clarissa:—"You are almost as pale as your friend, madam; it is enough that you support yourself."

This kindly young person was about twenty years of age, but she did not look much older than Clarissa. One could scarcely call her pretty, and yet she had a fair, sweet face, full of benevolence and tender thought for others. She was rather pale; her features were regular—so regular that but for a certain animation which continually overspread them they might have been called insipid; her manner was perfectly well-bred, and even graceful; her dress, though plain, was expensive and becoming; and her voice at once reminded Clarissa of strains of sweetest music.

By the united efforts of this good Samaritan and her maid, Madame Pierrot was safely conveyed to the little end room, where there was a sofa, and where she could remain quietly till she was equal to returning home. When she was a little recovered, she began to apologise for the trouble she had given, and to thank the strange lady and her servant, who had shown her so much courtesy. While she spoke, a gentleman appeared in the doorway, but he, seeing the group about the sofa, immediately withdrew.

Not, however, before Madame Pierrot had perceived him, and again she became rigid and incoherent. "There! there!" she cried, clasping convulsively her thin hands; "oh, Lady Clarissa! he comes again!"

Clarissa had seen the unconscious cause of so much agi-

tation, and had at once decided that Madame was under some strange hallucination. The gentleman in question, whom she had herself noticed more than once during the morning, was evidently a foreigner, though elderly, certainly not nearly old enough to be the husband of Madame—Monsieur Pierrot having been, as she well knew, at least a dozen years the senior of his wife, and Madame was now on the shady side of sixty. But then, it was not Monsieur, but his *ghost*, which Madame recognised, and, thought Clarissa, “Perhaps they don’t grow older in the other world! Monsieur Pierrot might have been about five-and-forty when he was guillotined, and he still remains the same. Ah! but that is nonsense; I don’t believe in ghosts that show themselves; and whether there be ghosts or not, that gentleman is undoubtedly a flesh-and-blood mortal like ourselves. Why, he wore spectacles!”

And but that she was so truly concerned for her governess, Clarissa could have laughed outright at the notion of a ghost in gold-rimmed spectacles, with short-cropped grey hair, a waxed moustache, and a printed catalogue of the exhibition in his hand. No! the gentleman was certainly not M. Pierrot, and quite as certainly not his apparition. “You are deceived, dear Madame,” she said; “that gentleman is young enough to be your son. Monsieur, your husband, would be so much older, you know.”

“My son! Ah, Clarissa! he, too, is dead; he died long, long ago, a mere boy, as I have often told you. He was a lovely child when I saw him last! *Mon petit Henri! mon beau garçon!* No! it was my husband; did you see him?”

“Certainly I did, and quite as certainly I saw nothing ghostlike in his appearance. It was just an elderly French gentleman I saw; I have seen several such while I have been in town.”

“I tell you it was Henri Pierrot, my murdered husband. Child! child! do you think that a wife who has truly loved, *ever* forgets the face and mien of the husband of her youth? But, ah! you cannot tell, because you are a child. No! the lapse of years—long, cruel years—

is as the lapse of hours only when once more one sees the well-remembered face. My Henri comes to call me hence: God permits me this great grace."

"Can we not speak to this gentleman?" said the strange lady. "It will never do to let the affair end here; Madame is so much affected, so deeply impressed, that the consequences might be serious if she were left to the belief that she had really seen her departed husband—an inhabitant of the world beyond the grave! Come with me, and point him out, Lady Clarissa—that is the name your friend called you by, I think?—I did not myself observe the person, though I perceived someone in the doorway yonder. Bridget will take care of Madame."

Clarissa acquiesced: she felt that Madame must be calmed and satisfied at any price. If the gentleman would only come and speak a few words, the delusion would at once be dissipated. Accompanied by her new friend, she left the room, in search of the unconscious cause of such singular distress.

As they passed along, she said, "I must tell you that Madame Pierrot's husband would be between seventy and eighty years of age if he were living. And—you don't believe in ghosts, I suppose?"

"The popular and vulgar belief in ghosts I certainly disown; I am far from superstitious, yet I do think that one's eyes *might*, under certain circumstances, be opened to behold that which is not mortal—that which is commonly invisible to flesh and blood; but I have no hesitation in saying that the gentleman in question is quite as much an ordinary human being as anyone else in these rooms at present."

"He wore spectacles, and his moustache was waxed, French fashion," said Clarissa, impressively.

"Most unghostlike. Besides, a *bonâ-fide* ghost would have appeared to Madame alone; it would not have shown itself to you, to me even, to all these good people sauntering up and down."

"And to the officials downstairs, for I suppose he must have bought and paid for the catalogue of the pictures which he held in his hand. But I do not see him anywhere about."

"How is he dressed?"

"In ordinary morning costume. His trousers are light, his coat, I fancy, is bottle-green, and he is not very tall."

"There he is, then! Look! he is just beside that stout lady in the embroidered pelisse. I am sure it is he—light trousers, green coat, gold spectacles, waxed moustache, and all!—even to the catalogue in hand, which, as you truly remarked, must have been purchased of the officials downstairs. Am I not right?"

"You are, madam. Now what shall we do? Will you speak to him? You are older than I—is it not so? I am only a school-girl."

"I have ceased to be a school-girl for several years; nevertheless, as Madame is your friend, I think it would be better if you spoke to him yourself."

"Very well," replied Clarissa; "I will accost this gentleman, if you think it is right that I should do so. But I am very glad of your countenance at this crisis, and I thank you heartily for your great courtesy and kindness."

At this moment the gentleman turned, and beheld the two girls close to him, and evidently desirous to address him. He immediately bowed as only a Frenchman can bow, and with the utmost respect said, in very bad English, "Is it that I can assist you, honoured meeses? I am your very humble servant."

Without the slightest embarrassment, Clarissa replied, in the purest French accent—"Sir, I entreat your pardon; but I should esteem it a great favour if you would accompany this lady and myself into another room, where I have left my governess, who has been deeply affected at the sight of you. She is an old lady who has known great and terrible afflictions, and she has suddenly taken it into her head that you are one of her departed relatives."

The gentleman—his face was as kind as his manner was polite—smiled, and replied:—"With pleasure will I accompany you, dear mademoiselle; but let me assure you that I am not yet '*departed*.' As for relatives, alas! I have none,—none, at least, who are near of kin. The awful Revolution left me alone in my desolate childhood. Your governess is French as well as yourself?"

"I am not French, Monsieur; I was never in France;

but my governess is French, and she and I converse always in her native language."

"May I ask your governess's name?"

"She is Madame Pierrot, *née* de Brêcy, and she——"

And here Clarissa found herself reduced to sudden silence, for the gentleman turned pale, even as Madame had done at sight of him. He absolutely staggered as he laid his hand upon his heart, and, singular to record, the words he uttered were precisely those which had fallen from the lips of Madame not a quarter of an hour before: "*Mon Dieu! O mon Dieu! Est il possible?*"

And again Clarissa asked tremblingly *what* was possible! He rallied quickly, and replied, almost with a sob, "My name is Pierrot; my father was guillotined, and my mother was Helène de Brêcy. Can it be, *can it be*, that I have found my mother, whom they declared was dead?"

"I think it must be!" replied Clarissa, excitedly. "Madame's name is Helène; I have seen Helène de Brêcy written in some old books of hers—books of devotion. Oh! let us go to her."

"Will not the shock be too great?" asked the other lady. "Madame seemed very weak."

"She will not be pacified till she has seen Monsieur," returned Clarissa. "But if he will wait just one moment, I will go and say that he is a friend of hers, and a friend of her late husband, and that he begs to speak to her."

"That will do admirably. A few words by way of preparation will suffice."

"One moment, I pray you," interrupted Monsieur Pierrot, as Clarissa was about to depart on her embassy. "Has Madame Pierrot never spoken of her son?"

"She supposes that he is dead. Those who had care of the boy—*Henri* was his name—assured her that it was so. She seldom speaks of the past, but she has told me how she was imprisoned, and how her escape was contrived by one of her gaolers, who happened to be an old and faithful retainer of the de Brêcy family. She took refuge in England, and England has been her home ever since."

"Dear Madame," said Clarissa, when she returned to her; "you need not distress yourself; indeed, you may prepare to be very happy, for the gentleman whose like-

ness to M. Pierrot so agitated you, is a relative of his. I have spoken to him, and he knows all about you and your family, and can give you good news—oh! such good news—of your son. He begs to speak to you immediately; may I bring him?”

Madame was so bewildered, and withal so shaken, that Clarissa found some difficulty in making her take in the sense of what she was saying. She understood at last, however, that the imaginary ghost was a real living person, who claimed kindred, and wished to be introduced to her.

“Who can he be?” she said, with still the same dazed look in her pale face. “I know of no one—all of my own blood perished; all, or nearly all, my husband’s people are dead and gone. Still I must see him; but, Lady Clarissa, you ought not to have spoken to a strange gentleman.”

“Pray forgive me. It seemed to me that I must speak to him, and I assure you he was excessively polite. Besides, he is nearly as old as papa, I imagine.”

And then Madame tried to compose herself, that she might receive this mysterious stranger with all due ceremony. She sat upright, drew on her gloves, and smelled at her vinaigrette, looking anxiously towards the door. The two young ladies soon reappeared, bringing with them M. Pierrot, who advanced formally, but evidently with considerable trepidation. He could not remember that he had ever seen that grey-haired, pallid, aged woman before; but she looked into his face with an indescribable expression, which told him somewhat of her deep and scarcely-subdued emotion. Then he recollected that he had been assured often, on the best authority, that he was the living image of his father—and his father must have been very nearly of his age when he died upon the scaffold.

“Who are you?” demanded Madame, in a hollow, stifled voice. “Are you the dead come back to life?”

“I never died; but my father, whom I closely resemble, died—a martyr to his king, his country, and his religion—many, many years ago.”

“Where did he suffer?”

"In Paris, on the Place de la Grève."

"And his name—his name? Oh! you have not only his very face, but his voice!"

"His name, which is also mine, was Henri Pierrot, and he married Helène de Brêcy. *Are you she?*"

But Madame had fainted; the dawning joy was too intense for her enfeebled frame. A physician, who was happily in the room, hearing that a lady had swooned, offered his services, and in a short time she was sufficiently recovered to be led, or, rather, carried in her son's arms, to the coach which had been called. For when she opened her eyes, and knew that she had not dreamed, she understood it all. Once again she was a mother, and this grave, elderly gentleman was indeed the "*petit Henri*," whom she had mourned so long as dead. Of course, such a mistake could not easily occur in the present day; but similar cases were by no means uncommon in the earlier decades of this our nineteenth century, when England and France were at war, and poor France still topsy-turvy in every point of view, from the effects of the shocks and horrors it had sustained after the dethronement of Louis XVI. and his unfortunate queen; when there was little communication with Continental countries that was not of a belligerent character; and last—not least—when there were neither railways, electric telegraphs, nor a dependable foreign postage.

"May I not inquire your name?" asked Clarissa of the young lady who had befriended her, and towards whom she felt herself most unaccountably drawn. "I should so like to see you again. I feel as if we ought to be, at the least, acquaintances."

"My name is Susan Shrosbery. And yours is Lady Clarissa —?"

"Lady Clarissa Oakleigh."

It was to be a day of startling surprises. "Then," said Miss Shrosbery, her face all aglow—"then you must be the eldest daughter of the Earl of Orwell?"

"Yes; I am Lord Orwell's eldest daughter," replied Clarissa, much puzzled at her companion's sudden excitement.

"And you have a stepmother?"

"Yes." And Clarissa sighed. She would not trust herself to say another word.

"Who is also mine," continued Susan. "My father, Peter Shrosbery, was the Countess of Orwell's first husband. I am the only surviving child of his former marriage."

"Why, we must be step-sisters, after a fashion," said Clarissa.

CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER STEP-DAUGHTER.

"For I'm a lady of high degree !
A lady of fashion, as you may see ;
I never soil my milk-white hands,
For I've gold and silver, and house and lands,
And jewels that really are rich and rare,
And for common people I do not care ;
I hold my own, as grand as can be,
For I'm a lady of high degree !"

How Madame Pierrot rejoiced over her long-lost son needs not to be told. The Earl sympathised with her most entirely, and even the Countess expressed a certain kind of satisfaction, and deigned to congratulate the happy mother, who was almost *too* happy to bear with composure the felicitations of people generally. But the appearance of M. Pierrot led to consequences which no one had foreseen. He was now comfortably settled in his native country, which was restored once again to all the blessings of peace ; he had formed an advantageous connection with a silk merchant of Lyons, and it was a matter of business that brought him to London, which he was about to leave on the following day, when, in the picture gallery, the delightful encounter took place, which changed all his plans, and overruled his immediate

engagements. M. Henri Pierrot was, as Clarissa had remarked, quite an elderly personage; he had married rather late, and was now a widower, and the anxious father of three young daughters, just growing out of childhood. He regarded the thought of a second marriage with extreme repugnance, and yet, for the sake of his girls, he had begun—though sorely against his inclinations—to contemplate the probability of another union, which would secure to them the maternal supervision they so greatly needed. It was therefore the most natural thing in the world that he should wish his mother to become the mistress of his household. He was determined that she should not continue in her present position, for though not actually wealthy, he was well to do, and able to provide comfortably for all his women-kind. And a grandmother would be far better than a stepmother for his Cecile, and Adele, and Meranie—to say nothing of himself, relieved at once from the oversolicitude of bringing up his daughters, and from the necessity of contracting an alliance against which his heart protested.

It therefore came to pass, that very speedily Madame Pierrot intimated to Lord Orwell her intention of returning to her native country, and Clarissa learned, to her dismay, that she was to be provided with another governess. The Earl was seriously annoyed, for he was not only well satisfied with Madame as an instructress, but he liked her very much for herself, and knew that he would miss her sensible and pleasant, though somewhat formal conversation. And yet he could not oppose himself to her withdrawal; she had done her duty by Clarissa, and now she would, as was equally her duty, transfer her services to her son and his young family. Nevertheless, Lord Orwell could not help wishing that Madame Pierrot had kept clear of the picture gallery on that particular morning, or that he had refrained from presenting his daughter with the tickets which led her and her governess to the fateful scene of the adventure.

“I don’t see what Clarissa wants with another governess,” said the Countess to her lord, in reference to Madame’s departure. “She’s turned of fifteen, and you

say—though I can't say I see any signs of it myself—that she knows more and is older in mind than many women of twenty. What's the use of teaching girls so much? Clarissa has been kept quite long enough at her lessons, and it is high time she began to make herself useful."

"In what way do you propose that she should make herself useful, Lady Orwell?"

"She might help with the little ones. I can't get a nurse that has any idea of keeping Fordham and Augustus in order."

"I am not going to have my eldest daughter turned into a nursemaid; and I thought, too, you had secured such a paragon in Morris?"

"Morris is all very well to manage babies, and I can trust her with the younger children; but the elder ones—all, indeed, but Selina and the baby—require something which she has not. In fact, I have been seriously thinking of inquiring for a nursery-governess."

"That is as you please, my lady; have ten nursery-governesses, if they will only keep your unruly brats in something like decent order, and teach them to behave respectably. But I shall not allow Lady Clarissa Oakleigh to go to service just yet, even though her own stepmother wishes to engage her as upper-nurse. Clarissa will finish her education, and then she will, of course, come out, like other young ladies, at the proper age."

"Come out, indeed! Such nonsense! I wonder you are not ashamed of such an ordinary-looking girl. Why, she gets sallow as she gets older; I never saw such a wretched complexion, as yellow as yellow, and no more colour than in my pocket-handkerchief. It's a pity she isn't a Roman Catholic, because then she could go into a convent and hide her plainness under a veil. I think it is a great mistake that there are no Protestant nunneries, where ugly and portionless young women can be honourably settled."

"Nevertheless, Clarissa will be presented in due season, and she will go into society like other young ladies of her rank, and I see no reason why she should not marry. She has lovely eyes, and a sweet smile, and

a soft, musical voice, and she will be a companion for any man. As to her being portionless, I'll take care of that."

"Very well! Take your own way, and see what will come of it. You will have to introduce your beautiful daughter yourself, remember, for I give you notice I won't go out with such a fright, not if she were twenty Lady Clarissa's! As for another governess for her, you must please yourself; but when I was a girl, fourteen was thought a very outside age for the schoolroom."

"That is so many years ago; and besides, you were never Lord Orwell's daughter! I suppose, in the sphere in which you were brought up, fourteen *was* a very outside age for the schoolroom; but then your sort of people were supposed to be quite sufficiently educated, I take it, if they could read, write, and cipher somehow, and wonderfully accomplished if they could strum half-a-dozen tunes on a jingling piano, or draw a tumble-down cottage, or a tower that mocked the tower of Pisa, to say nothing of 'manners,' for which they paid extra, of course!"

Now, Louisa had never learned to strum even one tune, or to pencil the most impossible landscape, and her acquaintance with schoolrooms of any sort was of very humble, limited range. No *extras* of any kind had ever been vouchsafed her, and her governess charged, and rigidly exacted, sixpence per week, in return for the instruction which she imparted; and Louisa, like her schoolfellows, had carried the hebdomadal sixpence with her to school every Monday morning, as regularly as it came. It struck her, therefore, that she had better say nothing more on the subject of her own *curriculum*; on this, as on many more topics, she always got the worst of it, if her husband were provoked to that plain speaking in which, upon occasion, he certainly excelled.

But before this conversation took place Clarissa had mentioned to her father the circumstance of her meeting with Miss Shrosbery. "And I should so like to know her, papa," she said, in conclusion. "We are all but related, you know; why should we not be friends?"

Lord Orwell demurred; he loved not the name of Shrosbery. "There is no reason why you should not

have a friend, or several friends, if you wish it, of your own age and sex; but this girl must be considerably your senior, and, what is more, my dear, she is not of your own order."

"Indeed, papa, she seemed quite a lady. Nay, I am sure she is a lady. Ask Madame Pierrot."

"I can trust Madame's judgment, in such a case, implicitly. But I may as well tell you, Clarissa, I don't want to have anything more to do with these Shrosbery folks. I married Mrs. Shrosbery, but she quite understood that I did *not* marry her family!"

"And this Susan Shrosbery is not of her family, papa. She is no more to Susan than she is to me. In each case, you know, she married a widower, with an only daughter. It is curious that we should both be her step-daughters, and yet not be acquainted."

"What has made you take to this girl?"

"I cannot tell you, papa, because really I did not know. There was something in her that struck me the first moment I saw her, and she has such a sweet face! She looks as if she were always happy and at peace;—as if she knew something good that I did not know, and that I should wish to learn. Her face is like a poem, papa, and her voice is like a song."

"You make me curious to see her, Clarissa. But your mamma, I fancy, objects to the whole Shrosbery connection. A young man, a Mr. Shrosbery, called soon after we came up to town. He was a sort of half-nephew, or cousin's son, of old Shrosbery, I believe, and as we were all out, he left his card. Well! when the Countess saw it she immediately rang the bell, and informed Davis that she should never, under any circumstances—and she spoke emphatically—be 'at home' to this person. My own opinion is that she would not receive Miss Shrosbery."

"Perhaps she would object to receive me if you were dead."

"She probably would. Though she might not, as you have the advantage of being *Lady* Clarissa."

"Then I am not to be friends with this nice, kind young lady?"

"I do not see how you can be, Clarissa. I am not at

all anxious to extend my acquaintance in the Shrosbery direction; and as to the Countess, I know that she would like to forget that she ever was the wife of Peter Shrosbery—a man in business. And yet he was a good old fellow, too, and he made more of her little finger than I do of her whole body and soul. However that may be, the long and the short of it is, my dear, that you had better put Susan Shrosbery out of your head.”

And Clarissa obediently strove to forget the charming stranger, who had turned out to be, if not a relation, certainly a connection. But she was not to forget. Just before Madame Pierrot took her departure,—and, to please the Earl, she remained till the season was well over, and town rapidly thinning,—Mr. Hadfield arrived on a little urgent business—“private business” with my lady.

“I want to speak to you about Miss Shrosbery,” he said, as soon as he and the Countess were shut up together —“the late Mr. Shrosbery’s daughter, I mean.”

Now, though Lady Orwell was very fond of quoting her dear Peter’s superior excellences, and his devotion to herself, to her present lord, whenever he contradicted her or slighted her, or did those things which, as an affectionate husband, he should not have done, or left undone the things which he had better have done, she had an insuperable objection to his being named by any other person. A good many people knew that she was once a Mrs. Shrosbery, and she had given a certain edition of her former married life to those whom it might concern, which was, on the whole, more plausible than veracious. If it were once known that she had wedded a Bermondsey tallow-chandler, her Whitechapel antecedents might be suspected, and even Lord Orwell himself was blissfully ignorant of them. He had judiciously refrained from inquiring who Mrs. Peter Shrosbery was; he had not put a single question on this head to Mr. Hadfield, the only person who could give him reliable information should he desire it; and, strange to say, he had never heard, or at least did not remember, his lady’s maiden name of Sparks. He had married Louisa Shrosbery, and that was enough for him, and, what was much more to the point, he had married Mrs. Shrosbery’s money, and not Miss Sparks’;

therefore, it was not essential that her patronymic should occur in any of the legal documents and marriage settlements with which Mr. Hadfield was charged, prior to her becoming Lady Orwell.

Louisa always regretted that her first husband had made so complete a confidant of Mr. Hadfield, and I am afraid she would have seen his obituary in the public papers with something like a thrill of satisfaction. And yet he had served her faithfully, and he had made a Countess of her, and he had never, as she felt assured, breathed a word, even to the Earl, of that early history of hers, which for years past she had vainly longed to obliterate from the tablets of her own tenacious memory. So, when the old gentleman opened proceedings by referring to Miss Shrosbery, her ladyship answered tartly, "I have nothing to do with that young person; she was not left to my guardianship, and I decline to be troubled with any of her affairs."

"You seem to have forgotten the clause in Mr. Shrosbery's will, by which you were appointed her guardian, in case of the death of Mrs. Marriott, her mother's cousin, before Miss Shrosbery attained her majority."

"And is she dead, this Mrs. Marriott, whose name I don't at all remember?"

"She died a few days ago; and as the Buttermeads Farm now belongs to her son, a young, unmarried man, of unsteady habits, and obnoxious, for several reasons, to Miss Shrosbery, it can no longer be the home of the young lady."

"Where is she now?"

"In London, staying with an old schoolfellow, who, being acquainted with the awkwardness of her position, invited her for a few weeks, till she could make suitable arrangements."

"Could not you and Mrs. Hadfield take the girl in?"

"We could not, Lady Orwell. We are too old to receive so youthful an inmate. Besides, she is your ward, not ours."

"I will not have her here, and so you needn't press it, Mr. Hadfield. A girl from a farmhouse, indeed!—a rough, unpolished, milk-maid creature, with red cheeks, and red

hands, and a taste for sweethearts and rustic finery! No, thank you! I wonder what my lord would say to such a proposal? It is enough, too, to have one step-daughter to make your life a burden, and to come before your own precious babes, without having another foisted upon you just when you least expect it. But the long and short of it is, Mr. Hadfield, that I *won't* have this Susan Shrosbery under my roof."

"Very well, Lady Orwell. I am afraid, however, that such a course of conduct will subject you to a good deal of injurious criticism. It will be widely known that you positively refuse to receive the only child of the man who acted so generously by you, and the world will not hesitate to sit in judgment on the case."

"Judgment, or no judgment, can I, Countess of Orwell, be expected to charge myself with a young person brought up as she has been?"

"How do you suppose she has been brought up?"

"As farmers' daughters are commonly brought up, I suppose—to milk cows, to make butter, to feed calves, and that sort of thing; all excellent in their way, no doubt, and quite praiseworthy, but not exactly what one desires for girls of the upper classes."

Now Mr. Hadfield fairly lost his patience, and with it, to a great extent, his temper. As he grew older, he became less deferential to the ladies, and he *could be*—if greatly provoked, that is—absolutely bearish. He cared not a rush for the Countess of Orwell, and he had long deplored, as one of the great mistakes of his life, the share he had had in her second marriage. He felt ineffably disgusted as she sat before him, "as proud as a peacock, and quite as foolish," as he afterwards declared, pouring contempt upon a class so infinitely superior to that which had been her own in days gone by.

"Your ladyship does not seem to understand farmers," he said, stiffly, and with a certain sternness of tone that made his listener quake. "Of course, your Whitechapel training and surroundings would shut you out from anything like society; but I should have thought Lady Orwell might have learned by this time that the daughters of well-to-do farmers are generally well edu-

cated, not to say accomplished, and that they often find husbands among the gentry; though, of course, there are many grades of farmers, just as there are all possible grades of business men. I have known gentlemen farmers and most ungentlemanly farmers, well-born farmers and low-born farmers, wealthy farmers and poverty-stricken farmers, just as, in my long life, I have known parsons, lawyers, and doctors of every description, from men whom the world delights to honour down to miserable scamps and rascals. To sum up: there are farmers *and* farmers, butchers *and* butchers, grocers *and* grocers, as well as *greengrocers* AND *greengrocers*! as your ladyship must know better than I can tell you."

Her ladyship turned scarlet, and then white, with vexation and anger. So, then, he knew, as she had long suspected, all about those Whitechapel antecedents of which she was so bitterly ashamed. And yet she had no just cause to be ashamed of them; she was, as Louisa Sparks, selling potatoes and cabbages in a dingy little East End shop, far more respectable than the Countess Louisa making a barter of herself and her wealth in exchange for position and a title. She had never been so truly pure and virtuous as when she loved that young butcher to whom we have alluded, and she was a far better woman as Mrs. Shrosbery than she had ever been as Lady Orwell. She burst into tears as Mr. Hadfield ceased speaking, and declared that he insulted her.

And Mr. Hadfield, feeling that he had certainly done something of the kind, was slightly ashamed of himself, and hastened to make some sort of *amende honorable*. "I am really sorry, very sorry, to have given pain to your ladyship, and I trust, on the score of our long intimacy, you will forget and forgive my impertinence. We will not quarrel about ranks; let me only assure you that Susan Shrosbery is as thorough a gentlewoman as ever adorned the peerage. She is good and graceful, and I think pretty, and her education, far from being neglected, has been carefully attended to. She will more than pass muster with the titled girls of your own circle, and I must say I think she would be a nice companion for Lady Clarissa."

"You are very unkind, Mr. Hadfield, and I am sure I don't know why you should put me in mind of what I don't want to remember. I could not help being born in Whitechapel, could I, now?"

"Surely not. You might have been born in a far worse place—you might have been a felon's daughter, and seen the light first in Newgate. I never heard a word against your Whitechapel connections, Lady Orwell, nor have you—as far as I am aware—any reason to be ashamed of them. They were very poor people, and in what is called 'low life,' but they were not to be despised for that. Poverty and obscurity may be as respectable, and, in its way, every whit as honourable, as wealth and lofty station. My father began life as a very poor man, and my mother was the daughter of a small farmer—a *very* small farmer, mind—quite of a different class from that to which the Marriotts and the first Mrs. Shrosbery belonged. But I am not ashamed of them; God forbid that I ever should be ashamed of parents who did their duty by me, and to all men, according to their lights. And now—to return to our muttons—what is to be done with Miss Shrosbery?"

"Can't she go to school? She has plenty of money, I know."

"She is too old for the schoolroom; she is twenty years of age."

"Dear me! And so she must be! How time flies! I remember now, she was ten or eleven when her father died. I thought she would stay with those Buttermeads people till she married."

"So she would, I dare say, if Mrs. Marriott, whom she always called 'Aunt,' had not died. And she might have been mistress of Buttermeads—and a fine place it is—if she had chosen, but she could not fancy her cousin; and small blame to her, I say, for she had better have gone to her grave than marry such an utter scapegrace. In less than twelve months she will be of age, and I strongly recommend you, Lady Orwell, to grant her your protection till she is her own mistress, at least. It will soon be known that she is your ladyship's step-daughter."

"I wish there were no such things in the world as step-daughters!"

"And the step-daughters may possibly wish there were no step-mothers! Though it seems to me that the next best blessing to a good mother is a good step-mother; and I have known step-mothers who have loved their step-children as if they were their very own, and been loved equally in return."

"Well, Mr. Hadfield, I will consider what you say. I must confess that you always give me good advice. And if you think she won't be *too* rustic——"

"She is no more rustic than your own daughters will be. She has been at good schools, and the Marriotts always consorted with the county families. I believe she *can* make butter; she is rather proud of the accomplishment! But she need not make any while she is your ward; you can lock up the dairy if you choose, and put a padlock on the gate of the field where the milking-cows are kept."

"Of course I must consult my lord."

"Of course, of course! I don't fancy he will object to Miss Shrosbery; he will like her when he knows her; I should not wonder if she became a favourite."

"Oh!" replied the Countess, with a toss of her head, "I don't approve of married men having favourites out of their own family. If he makes any fuss with the girl, I shall wish her at Hanover; I hate flirting."

"I do not think Lord Orwell is at all given to that folly, and I am sure Miss Shrosbery is not. Dismiss your apprehensions on that score. When can you decide so as to let me know what I may say to the young lady?"

"I'll let you know to-morrow, at the latest; perhaps to-night. I expect, after all, she'll have to come here. We must make the best of it."

There was so much internal satisfaction in the tone in which the Countess talked of making the best of it, that Mr. Hadfield wondered what she meant; the truth being that she was saying to herself, "Perhaps, as it has come about, it may turn out a good thing in more ways than one. If she is so well educated, she might do instead of a governess for that Clarissa; and as I am a lady of title,

and she plain Susan Shrosbery, and my step-daughter, it will be hard if I can't manage to keep her under, and get some good out of her! If she'll take to the sweet children, she may make herself very useful with them. And I'll take care she has no time to go talking to my lord, or to go gallivanting here and there with him. He never talks anything but rubbish to me, and he sha'n't amuse himself with other women, however educated they may be! As to that, I am determined."

CHAPTER XXI.

A FRIEND AT LAST.

"One writes that 'Other friends remain,'
That 'Loss is common to the race'—
And common is the commonplace,
And vacant chaff well meant for grain.

"That loss is common would not make
My own less bitter, rather more;
Too common! Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break."

AND so, after all, Clarissa and Susan were to be near friends. As for Lord Orwell, he was considerably startled when, on the evening of the day of Mr. Hadfield's visit, his lady said to him, "Orwell, I have heard a piece of news to-day! The relative that took charge of Susan Shrosbery is dead, and she'll have to come here, I suppose. It's rather a nuisance, but it can't be helped."

"Why can't it be helped?" he asked, feeling a good deal mystified.

"It was in the will,—in my poor, dear, blessed Peter's will, only I had quite forgotten it, if indeed I ever knew it, for I feel positive Mr. Hadfield never mentioned it; and when I read the will, or heard it read, rather, I took

very little note of what did not concern myself, and I suppose I did not realise it. At least, it took me altogether by surprise when he mentioned it this morning, and I have not felt myself since, I can tell you. My poor nerves are not what they were before our marriage."

"What does all this rigmarole mean? And what was in Mr. Shrosbery's will that you either forgot or failed to realise? I do wish you could manage to speak intelligibly."

"You never give me time to speak intelligibly. You snap me up, and look so contemptibly at me, that I forget my words. Ah! how different it was in my dear Peter's time! I wish he had lived!"

"I wish with all my heart he had!"

"Ah! I know you mean to be contemptible."

"Don't you mean *contemptuous*? I wish you would learn to speak English, Louisa. But really and truly, I am quite in a fog as to your real meaning. What about Mr. Shrosbery's will?"

"Only that it declares I am to take charge of his daughter, in case of the relative with whom she lived dying before she came of age. And she is dead—the relative, I mean, not Susan. There! do you understand now?"

"Perfectly. But why should you regard Miss Shrosbery's presence a nuisance?"

"Step-children are always a nuisance. I declare, I am very unlucky to have *two*."

"Be thankful you have not a dozen! However, you have only yourself to blame, for you accepted both your husbands with the full knowledge that they were widowers and already fathers. But is it necessary that Miss Shrosbery should reside with us? Can you not take charge of her by proxy—she is not a child?"

"Mr. Hadfield says the world will cry shame on me if I don't receive her. And if you go and set your face against the girl, I shall say you are behaving very badly, seeing that you have spent thousands and thousands of the money poor dear Peter left behind him."

"I shall not set my face against her. She will not be much in my way, for I am going abroad for some months.

If you and Clarissa can put up with her, that is all that need be considered."

"*Clarissa*—indeed! I should like to see her object to any arrangement of mine! I am not going to consult Clarissa, I can tell you. *She* would have no right to speak if I brought a lunatic into my own house."

"As the house happens to be mine also, I think I am not in error when I say that my eldest daughter *ought* to have a voice in many little matters that need not be specified. Girls at her age are not usually so much overlooked as is Clarissa. Not that I anticipate the slightest objection on her part; on the contrary, I have every reason to believe that Miss Shrosbery's residence under the same roof will be highly agreeable to her. She will need a companion when Madame Pierrot has left us."

And so it was amicably settled. Mr. Hadfield received due intimation that Susan Shrosbery might join the household as soon as convenient to herself. And Clarissa was informed of what she was to expect. She had already begged that no other governess might replace Madame; she promised to study steadily if left to her own resources, and to get ready for her masters as punctually as though still under schoolroom law and regulation. "And I dare say, papa," she added, "Miss Shrosbery will like to take some lessons; it will be delightful to do things together. Why, I shall have someone to practise duets with, and to read with—oh! it will be altogether charming."

"You had better not say so in my lady's hearing, or she will quickly blow up your castles in the air. Have you ever mentioned to her your meeting with Miss Shrosbery on that unlucky morning—unlucky for us, that is—when M. Pierrot turned up?"

"I have scarcely spoken to the Countess since we came to town. Indeed, I have seen very little of her for the last few weeks; she has been going out so much, I believe—making the best use of what remains of the season, I suppose. And I am not sure that I should have mentioned Miss Shrosbery's name had an opportunity occurred. She might have been displeased, you know."

"Heaven knows she is displeased quickly enough," muttered Lord Orwell. "One can never guess one hour

which way the wind will blow the next ; it's tropical heat in the morning, and polar frost at night ; dead stagnant calm at noon, and cyclones and tornadoes in the evening. Take warning, Clarissa, and don't get into a habit of being easily offended ; don't imagine slights when none are meant, and don't fancy yourself 'affronted' when no affront is intended. It is vanity and self-love that make people captious and touchy ; and I need not tell you that such people miss the mark most completely, for they are never admired or respected by those who know them best."

"I will try not to be disagreeable, papa. I used to be terribly exacting as a child, I remember ; but all that sort of thing was driven out of me long ago. And a good thing, too ; for one must be very unhappy oneself, I should say, always suspecting some offence, or twisting careless words into studied unkindness and disrespect. I am not so very impatient now, I hope."

"Indeed you are not. Every time I see you, Clarissa, you remind me more and more of your dear mother. And she was the sweetest, meekest, most patient creature that ever breathed."

"Oh, papa, tell me something of her ! I know so little about my own mother, though I sometimes look at her likeness till I fancy I remember her quite well ; it is but fancy, for I have only a very dim recollection of our being really together."

"My dear, your mother was too gentle, too patient for one so selfish and heartless as I was in those days. I was not worthy of her, Clarissa. I never meant to be unkind, but I was—yes ! I confess it—I was little better than brutal to her. She could not live without affection ; love was as essential to her as the common food she ate. I loved her—I honestly think I did love her ; but I loved myself better, Clarissa ! I neglected her cruelly, while I sought my own pleasure—too often it was a pleasure of which she could not have approved. I left her to the care of servants ; I knew she was sick and ailing, that she steadily declined in health, and yet, day after day, I postponed my return, and so she died alone, and I never had any farewell from her dear lips, only a written good-bye, the

sweetness and meekness of which pierced me to the very heart. She left a letter for me, and some day it shall be yours. Do not judge me too hardly, my dear, and don't forget that I learned, when too late, the full value of such a wife as she was; that I appreciated, when lost to me for ever, the intensity of the wedded happiness which I was fool enough voluntarily to forego."

The Countess herself announced to Clarissa the advent of her other step-daughter, desiring her to receive Miss Shrosbery amiably, and not show any airs; winding-up with—"Please to remember that if you have a title, she has twenty thousand pounds! So don't come the grand 'my lady' over her, nor treat her as if she were dirt under your feet."

Conscious that she never did treat anyone as "dirt under her feet," though the Countess herself frequently did so when brought into contact with those she esteemed her inferiors, Clarissa did not resent the unjust imputation; but she thought the time was come to speak openly of her chance meeting with Miss Shrosbery, so she said, not without some trepidation—for she was nervously afraid of her stepmother's tongue—"I shall be very much pleased to have Miss Shrosbery here; I have seen her once, and liked her more than I ever liked anyone at first sight."

"You—have—seen—Susan—Shrosbery!"

And the Countess, in her intense amazement, dropped her words one by one, as if they were difficult of utterance.

"Yes! She was the lady who was so kind when Madame was ill through agitation at meeting her son whom she believed to be dead, and who was so strikingly like his father."

"Are you not mistaken?"

"No; she said her name was Susan Shrosbery, and that her relations to you were precisely the same as my own."

"And you never told me! Never said one word about it!"

"I think—nay, I am sure—we have not talked together, you and I, since that morning. If we had conversed at

all upon the subject, I should have mentioned this mutual introduction, of course."

"There is no 'of course' in the business! It is just like your sly, underhand ways, keeping it to yourself, for no earthly reason except that you can't be frank and open as other young girls are. You are as deceitful as ever, Clarissa! My lord says how much you are improved, but he is mistaken; I suppose you find it easy to delude him with your empty assurances of goodness and affection. But this proves you are just the same as ever; I shall put Susan on her guard at once, and then if she is deceived she will only have herself to thank."

"Indeed, I had no thought of being sly. It was only that you never spoke to me about the events of that morning. But no," she added, "that is perhaps not quite the truth; I did not know how you would take it! I thought you might object to Miss Shrosbery and myself knowing each other, and as it could not then be helped, and could make no difference unless we became further acquainted, I kept silence till now. But I do not think it was slyness."

"Oh, of course, it was all *my* fault! Whatever happens, *I* am to blame. Trust you and your father for justifying yourselves at the expense of others. Nevertheless, I spurn the insinuation; whatever faults I have, I am not, and never was, ill-tempered. My poor, dear, blessed Peter used often to tell me I was only too easy, too mild, and too unsuspecting; and that I should surely reap ingratitude and treachery as the consequences of my excessive amiability. And his words have proved too true!—*too true!*"

Whether "poor, dear, blessed Peter" had ever said anything of the sort was rather more than doubtful. The worthy chandler and soap-boiler would certainly have been excessively astonished could he have heard all the panegyrics he was supposed to have pronounced upon his second wife. Though in his time she had been far otherwise than now, she had steadily deteriorated in every way since becoming Lady Orwell, and every successive year found her more suspicious, more ungenerous, more envious, and more uncharitable. Perhaps this was not

entirely her own fault—perhaps the circumstances of her lot were not in her favour; perhaps Peter Shrosbery had understood her better than did the Earl of Orwell; and a good understanding of each other's character goes a long way towards the development of one's better self in all relations of life, but most particularly in the married state.

A few weeks more, and Susan Shrosbery arrived. She looked just as calm and sweet, though far less bright, than when Clarissa had first seen her in the picture gallery. She was also in deep mourning; altogether, she was greatly changed in appearance since that eventful morning, now two months ago. The Countess received her coolly, though for her not ungraciously. "Well! you are grown, Susan!" she remarked. "I never thought you would be so tall; you promised to be quite a little woman. How many years is it since we met?"

"Nearly nine years; I have not seen you since the day after my father's funeral, when I returned with Aunt Marriott to Buttermeads."

"She was your cousin, or your mother's cousin, was she not?"

"Yes, but I always called her 'Aunt'! She was quite as old as my own mamma, and she took mamma's place with me."

"She died rather suddenly, didn't she?" pursued the Countess, not seeing how the girl's lips quivered, nor how the tears were ready to start forth.

"Rather suddenly at the last, but she knew herself that there was no hope of recovery. For more than a year she was ready and waiting, as she told me, when she could no longer hide from me her precarious condition."

"Ready and waiting for what?"

"For death, or at least for what is called death."

"What can you mean, child? She *did* die, did she not?"

"Oh, yes; but she never spoke of it as dying; she always talked about '*the change*.' She used to say the true life was all to come, that it was beyond the grave. Except for leaving me, she was looking forward to that

hour—the hour when God would call her home. She was so happy, so very happy, and the last words we heard her say——

But here poor Susan broke down. She perceived that she was speaking, as it were, a strange language; that Lady Orwell neither understood nor cared to hear about those things which were most sacred and precious to herself; and the cold, haughty bearing and unsympathetic voice struck like an ice-bolt at the girl's sad heart.

"Pray don't cry!" said the Countess hastily, as, in spite of every effort, Susan sobbed almost hysterically. "If there is one thing that annoys me more than another, it is foolishly giving way to tears. Of course you felt Mrs. Marriott's death, but it has happened, you see, and not all the crying in the world will bring her back again. Besides, you say that she made a good end, and is doubtless gone to heaven, where, of course, we all hope to go when our time comes!" And here the Countess stopped and shivered, for her own words implied that for all *there was a time!*—a time when medicine, and celebrated doctors, and experienced nurses would be in vain; when gold and silver and goodly array would be of no more account than sackcloth and ashes; when even ranks and honours would fade away into empty names; when life would be only a short, vain dream, and eternity—close at hand—stretch on and on for ever and for ever, a dark, rayless, hopeless, chill, unknown expanse! And most fervently she hoped that her time was not yet; that many, many years of this world's pleasures remained for her. There was one clause in the *Litany* of the Church to which she professed to belong in which she joined always most fervently: "From lightning and tempest; from plague, pestilence, and famine; from battle and murder, and from *sudden death*—Good Lord, deliver us."

She soon recovered herself, however, and continued: "And when that time does come—in the course of Providence, naturally—survivors ought to be resigned. Dear me, Susan, it is the *common lot*! We all have to lose relations at some time or other, and if they were prepared, you know, and all that, we really ought not to mourn, for they are better off, and this world is a place of care and

trouble. There! don't cry! I do hope you are not of a melancholy disposition; your father used to get into the dumps sometimes, I remember, but not often. It's your duty now to be as pleasant and cheerful as possible, and pray don't wear that doleful black any longer; it's enough to give one the creeps only to look at you!—a walking funeral, I do declare! Such deep mourning was quite unnecessary for so distant a relative; black silk, slightly, very slightly, trimmed with crape, and jet ornaments, might have been permitted, on account of your long residence with Mrs. Marriott; but your present toilet, or want of toilet, rather, is most absurd. Pray let me see you differently dressed; pretty greys and violets, and white muslin in the evening, will be quite enough. There! wipe your eyes! It is the duty of young people to study the wishes of their elders as regards personal appearance. I am going to ring the bell for Coralie, and she will show you the way to the schoolroom. I hope Clarissa and you will not disagree, but Clarissa has a very unfortunate temper of her own, and she is not, I am sorry to say, at all sincere."

In spite of Clarissa's bad character, Susan found herself very much comforted by the kind reception accorded her in the schoolroom, where, in half an hour, she felt quite at home, and had almost made up her mind to a certainty that Lady Clarissa was neither cross nor insincere.

"We shall be left to do pretty much as we please," said the latter, as they sat in the fading twilight, after their tea. "No one, except servants, and now and then papa, comes up here; it is not generally supposed to be an advantage to be lodged *au quatrième*; but I like it. It is airy, and it is quiet, and one escapes disturbing visits that one might receive a floor or two lower down. Still, there is this difference, I am in the schoolroom, and you are already introduced."

"Indeed I am not. I never shall be, in your sense of the word. I am not a schoolgirl, certainly, but I have no idea of going into what is called 'society.' And as I wish to remain quite in seclusion for the next few months—till I am of age, in fact—I shall be so much obliged if you will permit me to join you in your studies. I suppose I

may have as many masters as I choose, provided I pay for them ? ”

“ I should think so ; but on this point you had better consult Lady Orwell. She is rather tenacious—I mean particular—about being consulted in such matters. It will be most delightful to have a fellow-student ; you will go into the drawing-room, though, every evening, I suppose—especially when we are back at Orwell ? ”

“ Indeed, I do not know. I had much rather not. And that reminds me, Lady Clarissa, your mamma said I was immediately to change my mourning. Do you think she really meant it ? ”

“ If she said so, she meant it, and she will expect to find you in regulation *demi deuil* by the day after to-morrow, at the latest. She does not like real mourning.”

“ I wonder whether I ought to change to please her ? It is quite against my own feelings to do so, but perhaps that is the very reason why I should yield the point. It is, after all, only a matter of feeling ; if I wore colours to-morrow I should still wear the same deep mourning in my heart. And the outside show does not matter much, does it, Lady Clarissa ? Only, I should have liked to continue my black dresses till after Christmas.”

“ And it is rather hard that you cannot. But please do not call me ‘ *Lady* ’ Clarissa. I shall be plain Clarissa to you, and I should like to call you Susan, if I may.”

“ With all my heart ; I have never been Miss Shrosbery among my friends. I am one of those persons to whom it comes naturally to be called by their Christian names. And you and I are to be friends, I hope.”

“ I hope so, indeed. And soon, I suppose, we shall return to Orwell. Do you like the country ? ”

“ I prefer it to the town, though hitherto I have always enjoyed a few weeks in London every year. Still, a few weeks was quite enough for me ; I never wanted to stay longer when it came to the time fixed for going home. Ah me ! I shall never, never go home to dear old Butter meads any more.”

“ You have been very happy there.” And Clarissa spoke tenderly, and slipped her hand into Susan’s. The very touch seemed to comfort the sorrowing girl, who had

lost the only person in the world to whom she really belonged—her mother, companion, friend, and kinswoman, all in one.

Clarissa knew that hot tears were coursing each other down Susan's pale cheeks, and falling unheeded on the folds of her black dress; she neither spoke nor looked at her; she had too much reverence for so great and deep a sorrow, and she knew instinctively that, for the present at least, silence was the truest sympathy. It never occurred to her to attempt to console her friend by informing her that hers was "the common lot," and that she only suffered what thousands of others suffered, and would suffer till the end of time. She knew her Bible very thoroughly, very much as she knew Racine, and Rollin, and Pope, and the schoolroom edition of Shakespeare, which Madame Pierrot had supplied. And only so, she knew it only as a classic—only as one of the standard books, with which it behoved her to be intimately acquainted. But something made her whisper presently to Susan, "They who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."

She did not know why she repeated the words, nor was it at all clear to her what it was to "sleep in Jesus." But it sounded consoling, she thought, and her heart yearned to comfort the bereaved one at her side. And Susan was comforted, and thanked God, who, as she doubted not, had provided for her the blessing of kind companionship and gentle sympathy. "And I hope," she reflected, though she did not say it, "that I am come here for good. I hope we two, so strangely linked together, may be a mutual help and comfort to each other."

At last, Nurse Barlow's prayers were answered; at last, "after many days," Clarissa's true friend had arrived. God had given her exactly what she needed most.

CHAPTER XXII.

MOMENTO MORI.

“We see but dimly through the mists and vapours
 Amid these earthly damps.
 What seem to us but sad funereal tapers,
 May be heaven’s distant lamps.

“There is no death! What seems so is transition.
 This life of mortal breath
 Is but a suburb of the life Elysian,
 Whose portal we call Death.”

THE Countess was extremely surprised to find “poor, dear, blessed Peter’s” daughter a thorough gentlewoman; or, to quote her own words, and to use one of her favourite expressions, “*quite the lady*.” She began gradually to question the possibility of making an upper nursemaid of her, and she even thought there could be no valid reason why she should not take her out, and present her to her fashionable friends as—“My eldest step-daughter, Miss Shrosbery.” But Miss Shrosbery declined; the kind of life which Lady Orwell led had for her, literally, no attractions, for her ladyship’s set was noted as being singularly frivolous, affected, empty-headed, and what would now be designated as “fast.” When graciously requested “to go a little into society,” Susan was very glad of the excuse furnished by her late bereavement, although, to please her stepmother’s fancy, she had changed her black array for second mourning.

“Oh, nonsense!” was the Countess’s reply. “You are not in crape and bombazine, and there is no earthly reason why you should not at once wear light silks, and white muslins trimmed with black ribbons—indeed, I am sure black and white will suit you very well. Of course you have jet ornaments, and I can lend you a pearl necklace, with a lovely enamelled locket, that my poor, dear—I mean your own blessed father gave me. Ah! if ever there was a saint on earth, Susan, it was *him*!”

Susan, though she had a very pleasant and kindly remembrance of her father, really knew very little about him, for she had lived at Buttermeads ever since her third year—since the arrival, in fact, of the second Mrs. Shrosbery; she was not, therefore, in a position to share the Countess's reminiscences, or to echo the laudatory expressions which any mention of his name provoked. She could only say, "Yes, I always understood that my father was a very good man. I have heard that he was a very just man, and generous also, that he never was known to speak uncharitably of anyone, and that he never permitted scandal to be talked in his presence."

"He was all that, and more," sighed his quondam widow, who had so long ago consoled herself. "Ah, Susan, no one knows what I lost when I lost him—the best husband that ever lived! My dear! he literally worshipped the ground I trod upon; nothing was good enough for me. Ah! I remember once, when we were staying for my health at Hendon, he went all the way to London to get me a partridge, because I fancied it. He'd have gone to Russia and back rather than have disappointed me. When you are married, Susan, take care you are not chosen either for your beauty or your money."

"I am pretty safe on that score," replied Susan pleasantly; "I have not enough money to attract regular fortune-hunters, nor beauty enough to fear being loved for my looks alone."

"Well! I hope, I am sure, you'll do as well as your mother did! But take care, Susan, men are the deceitfullest creatures living; there's no dependence on them; they are hot in the morning, and cold at night; they are all summer-sunshine one hour, and winter-frost the next. They are basely selfish, and have no hearts; those are best off that have no husbands—such husbands as there are nowadays, I mean. Take my advice, Susan, and be an old maid."

Susan made no reply. She was quite content to leave her future in God's hands, only she was resolved that she would not marry any man whom she could not truly love, reverence, and trust. She felt very glad to think that

her stepmother had no real power over her, for the more she saw of her, and the more she talked with her, the less became her esteem and her confidence. She made her understand, however, that for some months to come she must refuse all invitations, and that she was fully determined *never* to go into "society," in the fashionable acceptance of the word.

"I hope you are not a Methodist?" said the Countess, nervously, when she had heard Susan's final decision.

"No, I am not. We had some Methodist friends at Buttermeads—friends whom I trust never to lose sight of; but my aunt and I regularly attended the parish church."

"Oh, of course, of course! I didn't suppose you would be so vulgar as to go to chapel! But there are some people who keep their church, and yet are rank Methodists, notwithstanding—most objectionable people, always saying some dreadful thing to make you think about death and eternity!"

"It is a pity they should say what is '*dreadful*.'"

"Of course it is; but you can't help it if you will get upon such shocking subjects. It is such bad taste to refer to such things, is it not?"

"Excuse me, but I do not know exactly what things you mean."

"Things that have to do with the next world—death, and all that. Of course, one has one's religious duties, and one must attend to them. I go to church myself once every Sunday, except when I am too tired with a ball or the opera over night, and I am sure God Almighty isn't so strict and unmerciful as to require an attendance that would be downright distressing. But if I am *not* tired, and feeling pretty well, and if it is fine, I never miss; I make a point of going, either morning or afternoon; and when I am at Orwell, I not unfrequently attend Divine service *twice*. It sets a good example, and we, who are of high degree, *ought*, you know, to be a pattern to those beneath us. But to take one's religion into a week day, to mix it up with common things, is, I think, *impious*! And that is just what the people I call 'Methodists'—or I might say *hypocrites*—continually do. Oh,

dear! it's most revolting, and in the worst taste possible I am sure you agree with me?"

"No, I am obliged to say I do not. I cannot see any use or any comfort in a religion that belongs only to Sundays. Nor do I believe that the religion, if you can call it so, which does not control all we commonly say and do, is worth anything."

"I really don't know what you mean; but it sounds dreadfully *like* Methodism. It's my maxim that people that pretend to be so extra good are just no better than they ought to be, if all were known."

"Are any of us half as good as we ought to be, Lady Orwell?" said Susan, smiling.

"Well, no; perhaps not. I dare say we might all be better; but I don't believe in too much religion. And doesn't the Bible say we are all sinners? and don't we call ourselves 'miserable sinners' and 'lost sheep' every Sunday of our lives?"

"But are we not supposed to make confession with the intent to mend our ways?"

"Oh, don't ask me. I never troubled myself about doctrines, and never shall. Nor do I like this sort of conversation, making one so nervous and fidgety, and doing no manner of good in the world. There was a lady I met the other day—a very excellent sort of person, no doubt, but without the smallest conception of what is due to rank and position. If I had been the lowest, poorest creature in all London, she could not have behaved with more effrontery. She actually gave me a *tract*! She presented *me*!—the Countess of Orwell!—with a vulgar tract, entitled 'Prepare to meet thy God!' There! What do you think of that, Susan Shrosbery?"

"I think she was very courageous, and I dare say she felt most kindly towards you; and you know, Lady Orwell, that we must *all* appear before God sooner or later. We *must* meet our God, and He is no respecter of persons. The king must be judged as well as the beggar. And for you and for me the day of death will come——"

"Be quiet! How dare you!" shrieked the Countess. "You have made me feel very ill; I never can bear to see black, or to hear the bell toll, or to pass near an open

grave, just because it makes me think of death; and here are you sitting in my own *boudoir* on a sunshiny morning, and the bells ringing for a wedding—at least, they sound merrily enough!—and talking about *the day of my death*, as if I were going to die to-morrow!”

“I am sorry if I have offended you, Lady Orwell; but please let me say one thing more. Since death *must* come—and it must, we do not know how soon—would it not be better and wiser, and should we not be far happier, if we could look upon death as a friend rather than an enemy?”

“Nobody dies while they can help it.”

“But one cannot always help it. It is the one thing from which there is no escape. And if death must come, why not go to meet it calmly and joyfully, and——?”

“How can you? How can one calmly think of being snatched away from all one’s enjoyment? How can one be joyful, thinking of the grave where one must lie in cold, and darkness, and silence, and horrible decay?”

“I never do think about it, because I shall never be there. The poor, dead body they will bury, when I am what is called dead, will be no more me than that dress you wear is you. When your dress is worn out, you will put it away—it will concern you no more; you will continue to exist just the same, even though the dress that once covered you has become mere unsightly rags. And so, when your flesh and blood are worn out, or fallen into sudden ruin, your soul, which is yourself, will live for ever and for ever.”

“That is the worst part of it,” replied the unhappy woman, with a shudder. “We know nothing about the other side of death; we can’t help giving a glance that way sometimes, when something comes to startle us, and we feel that life really is uncertain; but it is all dark—dark, the very blackness of darkness!”

“It need not be!” said Susan, her eyes filling with tears of infinite pity. “The world to come is light, not darkness. Christ has gone before, you know, and the way has never since been dark. I don’t believe it ever was quite dark, even in the old times of the patriarchs and prophets; God’s saints must always have seen some light

before them, though it was dim and faint, perhaps. The dawn comes first, then sunrise, and then the perfect day."

But the Countess would not listen. She was of the earth, earthy, entirely so, and she could not grasp the true thought of anything beyond. It was true in her case, that the light was shining in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. "There! there!" she cried, at last; "don't say another word, I won't hear it. You have upset me dreadfully, and given me those palpitations that the doctor says are so bad for me. Go away, and send Coralie to me; I want my drops, and I must lie down. And, remember, I strictly forbid you to speak to me in this way again. Never, never introduce the subject of religion, for I'm too sensitive to bear it, and, what is more, I won't have it. Keep your Methodism to yourself, or leave this house."

Sad and sorrowful, Susan went away. Had she been too hasty? she asked herself; had she done harm while striving to do good? She could not think so; she had spoken with great caution and hesitation, for she was not one of those persons who believe firmly in the efficacy of their own appeals, and who, by reason of their own belief and profession, feel themselves constrained, without any regard to time, place, or circumstance, to utter their own convictions. Unwise speech is sometimes more harmful than a reverential silence; and Susan feared lest she had spoken unadvisedly on a subject of such transcending importance.

She went to her own room, feeling utterly cast down, and, oh! so desolate! She was so entirely alone in this great godless household; that which was best and dearest in her own apprehension of life was nothing, and worse than nothing, to those about her. Never before had she so thoroughly realised what it meant to be a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth. "And yet," she thought, "I could not but speak of the hope that is in me. I am sure I should have been faithless to Christ had I said nothing at all. No! the more I reflect, the more assured I am that I did well to speak. It was not much of a testimony to bear, yet I could not have withheld it. I am so afraid

though, lest I spoke in my own strength. I never thought till now how solemn a thing it is to bear witness to God's truth to those who are opposed to it. May God give me wisdom to act and to speak as for His glory, while I am in this place! *He* sent me here, certainly. I did not come of myself—nay, I would not, had I followed my own inclinations, have come here at all. I must be here for some end—for good to others, and for good to myself as well. Only—*only* that I knew how to set about doing what good I can, in the best way. Surely God will show me the best way, if I depend upon Him for help and guidance. Yes! I will put myself in His hands, and He will tell me what to say, and what to leave unsaid. He will give me such wisdom as I need, and keep me faithful, too."

That very evening something occurred to make Susan speak more plainly still. She and Clarissa had been practising their duets together, when a message arrived from the Countess that she was very unwell, and should not expect Miss Shrosbery in the drawing-room.

It was a relief to Susan, for she did not at all wish to go down—she very much preferred to stay with Clarissa in the schoolroom; but quite understanding—as the Countess had intended she should—that she was in disgrace, she could not help just changing countenance.

"What is it?" asked Clarissa, when the servant was gone. "Have you displeased Lady Orwell?"

"I am afraid I have; indeed, I am sure of it."

"Don't be disturbed. The Countess is so easily displeased, that we should have to sit in perpetual sackcloth and ashes if we did penance every time she was what she calls 'affronted'! It is of no use trying to please her, for she never is pleased for more than half-an-hour together."

"I think I could not help displeasing her this morning. I will tell you, and you shall judge."

And then Susan repeated, as exactly as she could recollect, what had passed between herself and Lady Orwell.

"Oh, yes!" replied Lady Clarissa, when she had heard all; "that would be quite sure to make her extremely angry, unreasonably angry, of course; but then a great

many people are unreasonable. I suppose I ought to have told you that mamma has the most insuperable objection to any sort of religious conversation. Nobody here ever talks about religion; only my old nurse at Orwell ever says anything of the sort. But nothing offends mamma like the merest mention of *death*. It is very weak and foolish, is it not?—for one must die.”

“Yes; one must die.”

“And one ought, therefore, to think of death?”

“That depends upon how we think of it, it seems to me. I have heard of monks sitting for hours contemplating a skull, by way of preparing themselves for death. They had better have contemplated life.”

“Far better, I should say. And death is so ghastly. Only fancy, the greatest beauty that ever lived comes to bare, horrid bones at last. How true it is that beauty is but skin-deep!”

“It is not true of all beauty; the soul beauty does not die, or grow unlovely in old age.”

“Do you mean beauty of mind? Madame Pierrot frequently spoke of that.”

“I do mean that, and something more than that. Just as intellectual beauty is beyond mere physical beauty, is the beauty of which I speak beyond that which is only mental. But I must tell you I am only repeating my dear aunt’s words. It was she who first taught me to long for, and seek for, a *beautiful soul*. If I say anything that sounds very wise, Clarissa, it is she who is still speaking through me, remember, not I myself; I can but repeat what she has taught me.”

“Did she teach you not to be afraid of death?” asked Clarissa, in a low voice.

“Yes, she did, for she taught me not to be afraid of God. No one who loves God truly can fear to go to Him.”

“I suppose she was not afraid herself when she felt that she was going to die?”

“Afraid! Oh, no. I think she had had doubts of herself for a long time, but as soon as she knew for certain that she could never recover from her malady, she began making her preparations, just like a person who is going into a far country, not intending to return.”

“And the preparations were——?”

“Entirely on account of those she had to leave behind her. To use Scripture phrase, she set her house in order; she was anxious to leave nothing unsettled, to omit nothing that could simplify matters, and save people trouble. She always thought first of others.”

“But did she make no preparations on her own account?”

“She had none to make; her life for years had been one long, solemn preparation. She was ready and waiting her Lord’s call. As for death, she did not believe in it.”

“What can you mean? Is not death a reality—a dreadful reality?”

“To those who remain it is, indeed, a most terrible reality. But for the person who goes we cannot suppose there is any cessation of existence; we cannot even be sure that there is any interval of unconsciousness. As the eyes shut down on this world they open to worlds unknown; as the senses grow dulled to what is passing around here, they are suddenly awakened to what is going on there; one life is indeed ended, but another has commenced. So death is not death at all in the common and heathen significance of the term. It is simply a change—a change of worlds, a change of conditions; but the spirit itself is the same—it came from God, and to Him it has returned.”

“And what do we really know of God?”

“Very little, comparatively. But we know enough to rid us of all our fears. God’s love, as revealed in Christ, is plainly set before us, and we need not be afraid of trusting all to that great boundless love; for it has never yet failed anyone, and never will, for *God is love*.”

“But can He love one who has forgotten Him, despised Him, sinned against Him?”

“God always loves, even when He punishes the sinner, for sin must be punished. But there is pardon for sin—full and perfect pardon, pardon for all who truly seek it.”

“And it is through Christ that we are pardoned?”

“Through Christ. Through His death, and through His life also.”

“Yes; but I cannot understand *how* it is. I once asked Madame to explain it to me, but I think she had no very

clear ideas on the subject herself. And then, you know, though she professed Lutheranism, she clung very much to the creed of Rome. She did not believe in the mediation of the Virgin, or of the saints, but she did believe in what the Church calls *Transubstantiation*. And she seemed to imply that salvation had something to do with the sacrament. How is it ? ”

“ I cannot tell you how it is, for I do not know myself. Mortal man cannot explain the great mystery of the Atonement ; he thinks he can, and so makes up all kinds of plans and schemes of redemption, as he audaciously calls them. But, when all is said and done, we know nothing, for God has told us nothing—only that we have sinned, and that Christ died for our sins, for the sin of the whole world ; that He shed His blood for us ; that in Him is life eternal ; that through Him and by Him we come to God,—that is all, and surely we need ask no more. Perhaps in another world the Divine mysteries may be revealed to us ; perhaps then we shall know what the Atonement really meant—what was the true mystery of the cross. Here we need not perplex ourselves with so-called ‘ schemes ’ and ‘ plans.’ We only know that forgiveness is offered us—a free pardon, for Christ’s sake. It is enough to take that pardon simply as it is offered, to receive Christ into our hearts, and to follow the example, as far as in us lies, of His pure and perfect life.”

“ Then you do not think the sacrament has anything to do with salvation ? ”

“ Nothing at all. In it we publicly testify our love to Christ, our acceptance of Him, and our belief in His everlasting kingdom. It is a means of grace, as people say—that is, a help ; but—and aunt said it in one of the very last talks we had together—it is no greater means of grace than any other. There is nothing more truly sacred—though it may have more tender significance—in the bread and wine that we eat in church than there is in common prayer and praise. Christ may be, and often is, quite as close to us, quite as *present*, in the silence of our own rooms, or in the singing of a hymn, as at His table, where we simply show forth His death, and look for His second coming.”

“Ah! that ‘second coming.’ How frightened I used to be about it when I was a child! For I heard someone say it was very near at hand. I remember particularly one gloomy Advent Sunday, and they sang, ‘Lo! He comes with clouds descending.’ And I shook with terror, scarcely daring to look up, lest I should see the Judge descending.”

“Ah! but you did not know who the Judge was, or you would not have feared. And you know, whether that second coming be to-morrow, or a thousand or more years hence, it does not matter in the least. The great thing, the only thing, is to be *found in Christ*—living a Christ-like life. For no one can be ready for Him who does not accept the gospel of His life as well as the gospel of His death. And, being ready, what does it signify whether we meet Christ on earth or in heaven?”

“I believe my own mamma was not afraid to die. I will ask Nurse Barlow to tell me all about her when we go back to Orwell. I am not sure that I should be afraid myself now—not so much afraid, certainly. Is there not something in the Bible about sin being the sting of death?”

“Yes; and the next verse says, ‘But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.’”

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BLOOD RELATION.

“A little more than kin, and less than kind.”

FROM that day Susan and Clarissa talked freely together, and Susan no longer felt herself alone. Lady Orwell treated her with marked coldness, and informed the Earl that she was a poor, vapourish, weak-spirited

creature, only fit for the rustic, secluded life of Buttermeads; but that she did not see how, as things were, she could very well get rid of her, and she kept Clarissa company, and obviated the nuisance of another governess! To which Lord Orwell replied that he had seen very little of Miss Shrosbery, but what he had seen pleased him; she must have shown her worst side to the Countess, for she appeared to him quite a superior young woman, and Clarissa found her all that she could wish.

And the Countess's answer was, "Clarissa! as if Clarissa were any judge! And as to yourself, my lord, you are always finding out 'superior women.' It is a vast pity you cannot give the palm to your own wife sometimes!"

"A pity, indeed!" sighed the Earl, and he walked away. He was getting tired of this petty warfare, these ceaseless squabbles, these wearisome complainings. When Lady Orwell took a certain tone, Lord Orwell beat a retreat as speedily as possible, for he knew by sad experience what it signified. He had begun to discover that there really are cases in which discretion is the better part of valour.

But her ladyship's horn had been exalted very high of late, and she had grown more imperious, more arrogant than ever. Did she not bethink herself how pride goeth before destruction—a haughty spirit before a fall? When she snubbed her lord, tyrannised over her servants, and insolently ignored her two step-daughters, she little dreamed of the humiliation in store for her. She little thought, as Mr. Hadfield would have said, of "the rod in pickle" for her. She was getting ready—the season being entirely over—for the seaside sojourn which she had promised herself when her lord went as usual into Scotland. She had determined to have her children with her at Brighton, and as Susan and Clarissa could not very well be left alone, they were permitted to attend her. It was September; town was "empty," of course, and the days were shortening rapidly.

One afternoon, Lady Orwell came in from a long course of shopping, very tired and cross, and was just retiring to her own sitting-room, when the servant in attendance

said, rather hesitatingly, "There is someone waiting to see you, my lady."

"I am tired, and I don't see tradespeople at this hour. You know that as well as I do, Johnston."

"Certainly, your ladyship, and I told the fellow as it were an utter impossibility that your ladyship could see him this afternoon. Says I, 'My lady is very methodical, and transacks all her business of a morning; and she never, by any chance, sees anybody of your sort after three o'clock.' And says he, 'How do you know what sort of body I am? Anyways, I want to see your lady.'"

"There! there! Johnston, that will do! I don't wish to hear any more 'says I' and 'says he.' Go and tell the man he need not wait, and send Coralie to my room with a cup of tea immediately."

Johnston obeyed, and Lady Orwell went to her boudoir, where she threw herself on the sofa, and impatiently awaited Coralie's appearance. But, instead of Coralie, back came Johnston, looking much disturbed. "The man *won't* go, my lady; he says as he has come twenty-five thousand miles!—or was it a hundred and twenty-five thousand miles?—on purpose to see your ladyship, and he don't mean to be balked of the honour, he says."

"Bless me, Johnston, he must be a thief, and, perhaps, a murderer! What does he look like?"

"Like a genteel scoundrel, my lady, and not so very genteel, neither. He's as evil-looking a chap as ever I set eyes on."

"And you let him in, and let him wait! Oh, Johnston, you old simpleton! Why, he and his gang will rob the house to-night as sure as you stand there! I dare say he's taking notes of the premises this very moment."

"No, he don't look like *that*, my lady," replied Johnston, feeling much aggrieved.

"Where have you left him?"

"In the little library, where there isn't no valuables, only old books, and some useless fishing-tackle of my lord's. He can't do much harm there."

"Harm or no harm, he shall not stay there any longer. Go back, Johnston, and tell him I won't see him for all

his impudence. Show him out, and if he won't go, turn him out."

"Yes, my lady," said Johnston, going softly from the room. But, in five minutes, he again returned. "It's of no mortal use, my lady; he won't budge an inch till he gets speech of your ladyship. And when I tell him I'll send for the constables, he says, 'Before you make a row, my man—for which nobody will thank you—take that to your lady;' and he gives me this here scrap of paper folded up. It's a dreadful dirty paper, my lady; perhaps you'd better put it on the fire, and send for the constables."

But my lady's curiosity was awakened, and, perhaps, something beside curiosity! She took the dirty scrap of paper, which appeared to have been torn from an old account-book, and carried it to the window the better to examine it. For it was a dull afternoon, and the light was failing, and, what was more, her ladyship's eyes were failing also. She protested they were *weak* from nervous headaches, to which she was subject; but the truth was, she really needed spectacles, and was much too vain and foolish to put them on. People of the Countess's stamp never do take kindly to spectacles, though they will condescend to an eye-glass occasionally; shallow brains cannot consent to growing old, and the growing-old process generally commences at forty, or thereabouts.

Lady Orwell was now forty-five, and a pair of first-sight glasses would have been most serviceable, only she could not make up her mind to "disfigure herself," and, as a rule, she contrived to do without looking into things very closely.

At that moment, however, she would have been very glad of any kind of optical assistance, for her heart misgave her as she gazed at the rough scrawl before her. There was something in the outline of the characters, and even in the coarse, crumpled paper itself, that carried her back to a day long past—a day that she fondly hoped and believed was dead and buried, without any possibility of resurrection. The colour faded from her face as she at last made out the words: "Lady Orwell! I want to see

you alone; don't send your flunkey to me with any more messages, but come to me yourself. I've a lot to say to you, and I've come from over seas—from you know where!—to see you once again. My lord is out o' town—the papers says so—or I shouldn't have come.—Yours, as always, JACK SPARKS. P.S.—You'd *better* come, for I won't take no denial."

She turned hot and cold as she pored over this strange epistle, so different from the smooth-pressed Bath post and delicately-tinted and perfumed notes which she commonly received. She had grown used to crested seals, and shapely-folded documents, and the scent of pot-pourri and patchouli, and she shuddered at the sight of the vulgar writing, and the rough, creased billet itself, carelessly crumpled like a bill, and smelling strongly of stale tobacco. But all that would have been as nothing had the detestable missive come to her from a stranger, from any insolent beggar or audacious small tradesman whom she could defy and order from her door. Alas! "Jack Sparks" was no unfamiliar name, and she *did* know where he came from, for Jack was the companion of her early youth, her blood-relation, her sometime lover, and the rival of the young butcher so often mentioned; in short, Jack Sparks was Louisa Sparks' first cousin, and she had once appreciated his society, and played him off against the amatory butcher as "a very nice young man!" But, in most families, there is *one* black sheep, and Jack was the unsatisfactory mutton of the Sparkses. He was "gay" and thoughtless, and would not settle to any kind of occupation. He liked to play at being a gentleman; he liked what he called "good company," and plenty of it; he liked pigeon-breeding and pigeon-flying; he liked tobacco, and pots of beer without stint; indeed, he liked everything that tends to the undoing of a young man in his class of life, and disliked all that might have conduced to his well-being and respectability.

The road to ruin is pretty much the same whoever treads it. Idleness and vanity, dissipation and vice, self-love and conscience paralysed, though varying in kind, work precisely the same result, whether the deluded youth be a peer's son or a costermonger's. Jack Sparks—

whose early history was a caution, only we have no time to relate it—went through the usual training with wonderful celerity. There was a time, doubtless, when he was rather weak than wicked, when he was what is commonly called “led astray,” when people blamed his companions rather than himself; but there soon arrived a period when he had to bear the burden of his own faults, and when no one thought it necessary to make excuses for him. He became a ringleader rather than a follower; he got into scrape after scrape, each one worse than the last, and, finally, he “got into trouble,” which meant that his country had begun to take notice of his delinquencies, and so constrained him to take a voyage to a certain penal settlement at the public expense.

The Sparkses—who were truly respectable in the common acceptation of the word, inasmuch as no member of their family had ever before disgraced himself or herself; had always paid their way, such as it was, and could boast that their men were honest and their women virtuous, which is a good deal to say of people brought up as the Sparkses were—felt themselves terribly aggrieved, and they one and all, in solemn conclave, renounced Jack Sparks for ever and ever, and agreed among themselves that he should be henceforth to them as dead and buried as were any of their departed relatives now mouldering to dust in Whitechapel Churchyard. And, all things considered, they were by no means in the wrong. A whole family is not to be ruined and disgraced for the sake of one incorrigible, impracticable rascal, who refuses, upon any terms, to be a brand plucked from the burning; and this the Sparkses felt, and they acted accordingly. Jack’s name was no more heard, his disreputable chums forgot him, and his kindred did their best to forget him also, finding, alas! that it is extremely difficult not to remember what you are always striving to forget.

But there had been passages between Jack and Louisa, for whom Jack cared as much as one of his unhappy character could care, and she, strangely enough—out of sheer perversity, some folks thought—took his part, and declared that he was shamefully wronged, that he had been made a cat’s-paw of, that there was a conspiracy against

him, and that, in short, he was paying the penalty of the misdeeds of others rather than of his own. And Jack was grateful to his "cousin Loo," and wrote to her occasionally from the other side of the world, where they ate their Christmas dinners in the dog-days and shivered with cold at Midsummer, and always promised that he would come back and marry her.

A most superfluous promise! for Louisa had no intention of marrying him. She had "*liked*" him well enough, as a girl; she was given to sundry likings of this kind, and she always kept a good assortment of sweet-hearts and followers. But Miss Sparks, from fourteen and upwards, knew better than to throw herself away; and the older she grew, the more highly she appraised herself—the larger, in her own estimation, were her deserts, and the more ambitious her designs. She had a soul above Whitechapel, and her aspirations soared far above green-grocery. She resolved "to marry a gentleman," which resolve culminated in her becoming Mrs. Shrosbery and cutting all her family dead, her own parents and cousin Jack included. Henceforth, Whitechapel was to her as the States of Barbary, and Spitalfields as Timbuctoo; and when people spoke of "the East," she immediately referred to Palestine, but thought she had once heard of an out-of-the-way place called Mile End!

As time passed on, Mr. and Mrs. Sparks paid the debt of nature. Louisa's sisters, whom she had never recognised since she left her old home, married badly, and went down in the world; her brother emigrated to one of the colonies—though not at his country's expense; her cousins—there were plenty of them—went hither and thither, and she heard their names no more.

As for Jack, he was utterly forgotten; even Mr. Hadfield, who made himself acquainted with most people's private affairs, never discovered the fact of his existence, nor dreamed of this one blot on the lowly, but honest, escutcheon of the Whitechapel Sparkses. Years had flown since any reference had been made to his sad history; no news came from over seas; his term of punishment was ended; and "doubtless," thought they who thought at all, "Jack Sparks is dead!"

So successfully had Mrs. Shrosbery arranged her plans, that she never, in any single instance, received a visit from her own family, nor was she ever threatened with any invasion of the Goths and Vandals—that is to say, of the despised Sparkses! Between the Sparkses and the Shrosberys there was a great gulf fixed; and as Louisa had prudently made a sort of elopement of her very advantageous and auriferous marriage, the majority of her kinsfolk did not even know her married name; and when the old people died, and the unlucky sisters sank into total obscurity, no one remained who could give any clue to Louisa's whereabouts, or even guess at her actual position. As for the Countess of Orwell, no Whitechapel person ever dreamed that she and Louisa Sparks were one!

Terrible, therefore, was the blow now dealt by the unwelcome returned prodigal. It is not too much to say that her ladyship tottered and reeled as she received it. And yet she contrived not to betray herself; the dull afternoon and the shadowy curtains were in her favour, and Johnston happily was one of the densest of his species.

She took counsel with herself on the spot:—"What shall I do? Suppose I say I never heard his name? Suppose I boldly send for the police, and denounce him as an impostor, or a madman? That would rid me of him for the present; but Jack—if he is the Jack of old times—will not be nonplussed in that cool fashion. I know what he would do: he would revenge himself by telling the truth—*publicly*! and it would be in vain that I denied his statements. It's a very hard thing to fight the naked truth! In less than a week all the world would know that the fashionable, haughty—yes! I know I'm haughty!—Countess of Orwell—the wealthy, and presumably well-born, Mrs. Shrosbery—was once a poor, humble nobody, the daughter of nobodies, and brought up among vulgar nobodies, at the East End of London! There will be plenty of people glad enough to hunt the secret down; plenty who will rejoice over my discomfiture; plenty who will be delighted to flourish my Whitechapel pedigree in my very face! Yes! I know; but it sha'n't be. I will see him—I must act cautiously."

Then, again, she questioned when and how the interview

should take place. Should she go to him? It would seem better, since she always saw tradespeople, and petitioners, and her inferiors generally, in the little library downstairs, which had long since been devoted to business purposes as a waiting-room. Then, on the other hand, might she not dazzle him if she received him in her own elegant, brilliant boudoir? might he not feel "dashed," and cowed, and generally subdued, at the mere sight of the state and splendour of her surroundings? Her resolution was taken, and she turned to Johnston, who stood patiently awaiting orders. "Light the lamps, and show the man up here. I see, now, who it is—one of my very oldest pensioners! Why did he not send up his name before? He left the country, and I quite thought he was dead. Poor fellow! he has been most unfortunate. Speak gently to him, Johnston; he is rather rough sometimes; but I fancy he is not quite right here," and the Countess significantly touched her forehead; "not mad, you know; only just a little queer."

Greatly astonished at the unusual tone of his imperious mistress, Johnston went to do her bidding, and in a few minutes returned, bringing with him the unfortunate pensioner, whose looks belied him, if he were not a veritable *mauvais sujet*.

Jack made a low bow to his supposed lady-patroness, who recoiled with horror on perceiving his appearance. He was shabby almost to squalidness, and yet there was a jaunty, pseudo-genteel air about him, which might account for Johnston's impression of mingled scoundrelism and gentility. His face, which had lost every trace of good looks, wore a determined and desperate expression that made Louisa shudder. His gait was slouching, his manner at once cringing and insolent, and he brought into the room with him a strong odour of the unpopular scent which had characterised his written message.

The Countess saw that the door was quite closed, and also satisfied herself that no one was within earshot, before she spoke.

"Now, then!" she said, coldly, "what is it? I am greatly pressed for time, and will thank you to be brief."

"That's a good 'un!" returned Jack, looking cruelly

injured. "And I've come all the way, over seas, from that cursed place over there, on purpose to set eyes on you, Cousin Loo! I didn't *quite* expect as you'd ask me to dinner, and introduce me to your dukes and duchesses, so I didn't come in evening toggery—ha! ha! But I did look for a little kindness after all these years of absence; I did think as you'd be glad to see me."

"How *can* I be glad to see you, remembering how you went away—the first that ever brought disgrace upon an honest name?"

"Follies of youth, my lass; follies of youth!" cried Jack, with a diabolical leer, and a motion of his jaws, as though he were chewing tobacco. "That's all forgiven and forgotten now, old scores wiped out, and a new leaf turned over. Let bygones be bygones; I'm agreeable."

"And I am not, Mr. Sparks. Once more, I ask you, What do you want? If a trifle would be of any service to you ——"

"No, it wouldn't; I never held with trifling of any sort. But I do want something of you, Loo, my dear. First of all, I want a kiss, for the sake of old times."

"A kiss! How dare you? Don't offer to touch me, or I'll——"

"Hoighty-toighty! don't disturb yourself! I can do without the kiss very well; I only meant it as a compliment and a token of cousinly affection—nothing more, I vow! I am too old for spooning now, and so are you, I should say. Why, you've growed into quite an elderly, stout party! Not but what you and I have had many a kiss before now, haven't we? I remember, as if it was yesterday, the last time; it was just afore I got nabbed; and I come in towards dark—as it might be now—and found you a-selling half a bunch of carrots to the milkman; and you had red beads round your neck, and you looked ever so handsome! and you was a bit slimmer than you are now—eh, Loo? Well, you won't kiss me again? Never mind! it's quite as well; my wife might be jealous—women mostly are jealous, you know; I'll go bail you keep your lordly husband to his cake and milk! So let's come to *business*. I expects to find you generous and open-handed, for you always was, and I hear you are

stunning rich—curls your hair every night with bank-notes, and gives the beggars sovereigns wrapped up like coppers !”

“Someone has told you most absurd stories. However, I am not poor ; and, as I said before, if a trifle will be acceptable——”

“I say, Loo, what’s your notion of a *trifle*, now ? Some folks call half-a-crown, or even a sixpence, a trifle ! I call that mean, I do. And I’ve known jolly fellows fling you their purse, and tell you to help yourself, and I call that handsome, I do ! But what do *you* call a trifle ?”

“A sovereign ; or, if I could be quite sure that you would not come here any more, I would not mind going to a £5 note.”

“I say, Loo, I never were a flat.”

“On the contrary, you were always too sharp to do yourself any good.”

“Sharp or flat, I’m not going to be put off in that way, my lady. What’s the use of £5 ? I want a cool hundred—*there*.”

“And you may want it, as far as I am concerned. Take £5, or *nothing*.”

“But I won’t take £5 ; I’ll take, at least, ten times five, on account say, and the rest another time. Come now, Loo, be generous. Look at this fine house, and this snug room that’s fit for a crowned queen ; and look at you with your diamonds, and your gold chain, and heaps of money at the banker’s, and everything about you like a noble lady.”

“What has that to do with you ?”

“Just this : that I mean to be the better for your good luck, Loo ! There ! that’s plain English. And you may as well let me have it agreeably as disagreeably.”

“Do you know that I have only to ring the bell, and give you into charge, Mr. Sparks ?”

“I know that *you won’t*, my lady ! You’d get the better of me for the hour, Loo, but you’d pay too dearly for your little game. I should go before the magistrate as a natural consequence, and equally as a natural consequence I should say, ‘My lord, the Countess of Orwell, as was old Shrosbery’s wife, as was Loo Sparks, of Whitechapel, is my own cousin ; my father and her father was brothers,

which she herself won't deny. And I only went to pay her a friendly visit and ask a favour, for we were sweet-hearts before I went out to the *Floral Creek*—that's the fashionable name for Botany Bay—and she cut up rough, and didn't receive me as a kinswoman should.' I'd give more particulars if they wanted 'em, and I dare say they would, and then it would be all printed in the papers, Loo, my dear, and wouldn't there be what the French call an exposy! There! don't turn pale; I won't hurt you if I can help it. I am sure the way you've played your cards does you infinite credit, and I don't envy you your luck, only I want to profit by it just a little. You give me £50 down—on account—and another £50 in six weeks' time, and you shall have no unpleasantness through me. I'll keep dark, and never let out nothing. From what I can learn, nobody knows as you once was Louisa Sparks, as worked hard for her living, and was a good girl, though poor and lowly."

"No one knows it," sobbed Louisa, now fairly beaten. "And I'd rather *die*, Jack"—the familiar name slipped out unawares—"than let anybody know it. If my lord found it out, I should be ready to kill myself."

"Tut! tut! he'll never find it out through me, if only you'll be just a little kind, and own me for your cousin on the quiet. Then you'll let me have the £50?"

"Well, I suppose you *must* have it. But mind, I make no further promises."

"No more don't I, then! What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, you'll find, my lady. Thank you; I do love the feel of new bank-notes. I'll write to you, so that nobody will understand my letter but yourself, when I want more money, and I'll sign myself 'Percy Howard,' or something aristocratic. And I shall keep my eye on you. Good-bye, Loo! we are going to be friends, that I can see."

And at last he was gone, and poor "Loo" had palpitations now in sad earnest. She was equally angry, mortified, and frightened, for he had no sooner left her than she began to ask herself, "How did he find me out? Someone must have given him the clue! Someone knows who I really am!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON THE SOUTHBOURNE SHORE.

- "God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.
- "Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smiling face."

THAT autumn passed pleasantly to Susan and to Clarissa. They were allowed to do pretty much as they liked, and as the weather was generally fine and warm, they spent a great part of every day out of doors, rambling on the beach, exploring the wild glens and ravines which here and there divide the hoary cliffs, or inhaling the fragrant salt-breeze on the upland downs which stretched for many a mile above the rocky coast. It was in every way a healthful life that the two girls led, though surrounded on every side by vain and frivolous people, whose only anxiety was "to kill time" in the way most agreeable to themselves.

Lady Orwell treated Susan coldly and distantly. She observed towards her a certain courtesy, and she was not obviously unkind; but she avoided her as much as possible, and if by any chance they were thrown together when other persons were not present, the Countess took great pains to speak only on subjects which could not, or ought not naturally, as she imagined, to drift into a religious channel. At the same time, she admitted to herself that Miss Shrosbery was a very pleasant young person, by no means the gloomy ascetic she was quite prepared to find her; and she might have proved an entertaining companion, had it not been for her obvious proclivities in certain directions. "I really should like to talk to her sometimes," she said to her intimate friend and ally, Mrs. Grandison, at whose instance it was that she had condescended to

patronise Southbourne, then an obscure and comparatively unfrequented watering-place; thus traversing some of her own schemes, which had all been laid for Brighton, where gaiety and fashion, though of a slightly different order, abounded then as now. The human machinery which sets in motion and keeps going that wonderful invention called "fashionable society," is complex in the extreme, and mysterious as it is complex. There are wheels within wheels, and curious unseen springs, and hidden pulleys, all rising and falling, and winding and rotating in a marvellous manner, which very few can comprehend.

Mrs. Grandison was not rich, for she had a speculating husband, who made ducks and drakes of the very handsome fortune she had brought him. He was always making some wonderful discovery, or inventing some out-of-the-way scheme, which only needed the outlay of a few hundreds to insure a vast return of wealth. But of all heathen gods whom nominal Christians worship, Plutus is perhaps the shyest, the most capricious, and the hardest to be propitiated. He has his favourites, of course, who sow sparingly and reap bountifully, and who get—*somehow*—cent. per cent. for all their money! But for one such darling of fortune, there are scores towards whom he turns a deaf ear and a frowning aspect, and out of every hundred who seek his dazzling shrine, very, *very* few can find him. He is a partial and fickle deity. Pity that so many men and women of this world should break the first commandment for the sake of such a sorry, arbitrary King Log.

And Mr. Grandison was *not* beloved of Plutus; what he gained by one "splendid investment" he lost by another, and too often his losses were without any corresponding gains—the consequences being that he grew poorer and poorer, to the intense annoyance of his bitterly-disappointed wife, who was ambitious, and loved money for the sake of what it bought. Within the last year or two, it had come to pass that Mr. Grandison found himself the owner of some hundreds of waste acres, allotted to him, as *shares*, in a company just started for the building and establishing of new cities—particularly sea-ports—all over England, and, if the plan succeeded, all over Scotland too. Land was to be bought cheap—"dirt

cheap"—in certain remote districts, and rendered valuable by the uses to which it should be put. Southbourne was a fishing village, and not much of that, but it was on the coast, there was a fine open sea, and the scenery round about was beautiful.

It was resolved that Southbourne should be transformed into a fashionable watering-place, and Mr. Grandison was one of the unfortunate promoters of a scheme which ruined all who put their hands to it at the outset, and made the fortunes of a few as yet unborn, who came to the rescue long years afterwards. Mrs. Grandison persuaded Lady Orwell to *patronise* Southbourne; and her ladyship, who was delighted to play the leader under any circumstances, after a very little entreaty allowed herself to be persuaded. "For you must know, dearest Louisa," said Julia—they called each other by their Christian names—"that if *you* take a thing up, all the rest will follow. Let it be known that the Countess of Orwell and family have arrived at Southbourne, and people of every degree will be anxious to try the air; your name will be the making of the place! And really it is a sweet spot, and so salubrious, or else I would not for worlds have recommended it; and I know what good it did me, after I recovered from that typhus fever three years ago, and it quite set up Miss Arabella Bunter, when she had danced herself one foot into the grave in her first season. And there are boats and an esplanade, and a band and a circulating library; and there will be, very soon, a pier and baths, and everything else which one expects to find at a favourite watering-place. We must get up a charity ball—there are no assembly rooms yet; but I am sure, with your co-operation and with the *prestige* of your name, it can be carried out most charmingly."

And so Louisa was won; but I very much doubt whether she would have thrown Brighton over quite so easily, had the audacious Jack Sparks, of "Floral Creek," never put in an appearance. However that might be, a place was taken at Southbourne, the children and their nurses were summoned from Orwell, and by the middle of September they were all comfortably settled in a commo-

dious house; and the Countess, tired out with a succession of gaieties, and secretly harassed and perturbed in mind, in consequence of her cousin's recent visit, was content for awhile to bury herself in seclusion, and enact the part of *grande dame* for the benefit of all the professionals and tradesmen's wives, who, tempted by alluring reports of salubrity and cheapness, were spending their autumn holiday at Southbourne.

"Yes, I should like to talk to her sometimes," said the Countess, "for she can really be extremely entertaining. She is clever undoubtedly, and, on the whole, not unamiable; and though one cannot exactly call her pretty, for she has no complexion, she has a very distinguished air—don't you think so?"

"Very distinguished!" replied Mrs. Grandison. "I noticed her patrician style the first time I saw her. But why do you not talk to her, Louisa dear?"

"Because she shocks me so! she talks on subjects which—I really do not know how to explain to you——"

"Surely she does not converse on improper subjects, so refined a creature? Though, after all, appearances are deceitful, and you have had nothing to do with her education, you tell me," said Julia, very much amazed.

"Well! I suppose the subject which I mean would not be classed as 'improper;' a thing may be quite proper, you know, and yet entirely out of order, in bad taste, and therefore undesirable."

"Of course it may; very much which may be purely right in itself is often inexpedient. But do tell me what it is of which you disapprove. I am quite curious."

"Well, to tell the truth, she is as arrant a Methodist as ever lived!"

"*A Methodist!* How dreadful! What low company she must have kept! No wonder you are distressed! And yet, was not the Countess of Huntingdon a sort of Methodist? And there was Lady Glenorchy, and some other ladies, all of high birth and position, who made the greatest fuss in the world about religion!"

"That is just it! Susan is not a real Methodist, for she goes to church; but she is what you would call *pious*, and insists that religion was intended for week-days as

well as Sundays. I could put up with that if it were not for the dreadful way in which she speaks about death, and eternity, and the world to come. One might as well set up cross-bones and a skull, as I have heard the monks do, to remind themselves that they must die, as enter into ordinary conversation with Susan Shrosbery. Something dismal is sure to pop out, and it hurts my feelings."

"So very inconsiderate! I wonder so modest looking a girl should presume to obtrude her sentiments, especially when she perceives they are far from acceptable."

"Ah! my dear, young people are not what they were in our time. Reverence and filial respect were the rule when I was young, and now they are the exception. Young people, now-a-days, think, and even assert, that they have as good a right to their own opinions as their elders have to theirs. It's a revolutionary age."

And the Countess shook her head, and so did her friend, and they sighed together over the degeneracy of the times, just as elderly people sigh and make their moans to-day over the changes that have taken place in society since they were young; extolling the golden days, which were no other than those of which these two ladies so bitterly complained. So it ever has been, is now, and ever will be, till the end of time.

"And yet," continued Mrs. Grandison, when Lady Orwell had recited a whole new chapter of "Lamentations"—"yet, do you know, my dear Louisa, I should have said the girl was of a very cheerful disposition. There is something—something I cannot describe—a sort of quiet brightness in her face, that almost fascinates one. I saw her the other day, sitting on the rocks at low tide; she had a book on her knee, and she was talking to Lady Clarissa, and I looked at her face, and wondered what it was that made her *almost lovely*! Such a bright, sweet face it was, looking out to sea, as if it saw something at the very farthest verge of the horizon—something it loved and watched for."

"Well! I must confess that puzzles me. She is, as you say, cheerful, even bright. And yet I am positive she is always thinking about dying. Coralie tells me she and Lady Clarissa talk about little else."

"That must be bad for Lady Clarissa. She should not be encouraged in morbid reflections."

"As for that, Clarissa is so peculiar that she is essentially morbid in herself. I do not think Methodism itself could make her more morose and gloomy than she has been ever since I came to Orwell. I wish she would turn Methodist, if it would cure her of her ill-temper, and her proud, disdainful ways. She was always a source of trouble, and lately—since my lord has most unaccountably taken to making a fuss with her—she has become unbearable. Ah! a woman little guesses what she takes upon herself when she consents to be a stepmother!"

It was a week after this conversation that Mrs. Grandison, taking her walks abroad early one morning, came suddenly upon Susan Shrosbery, seated under the cliff, and without her usual companion. "Where is Lady Clarissa?" asked Mrs. Grandison. "I thought you and she were inseparable, Miss Shrosbery. I have not seen you apart since you came with your mamma to Southbourne."

"Lady Clarissa is not quite well," replied Susan, "and she would not hear of my remaining at home on her account. Indeed, silence and sleep are the only cure for her complaint."

"What is it ails her?"

"She has one of her bad nervous headaches. She is subject to nervous headaches, and while they last she suffers much pain and distress. They leave her, too, in a state of extreme prostration."

"Does she have them often?"

"That depends, I believe. She had several in London before we came here. But this place has done her—has done us both—an infinitude of good. Lady Orwell says you persuaded her to come; I am sure Clarissa and I owe you our sincerest thanks."

This was the way to Mrs. Grandison's heart, though Susan did not know that. And as she went on to enumerate the advantages of Southbourne, as compared with other marine and far more popular resorts, the good lady thought her one of the most intelligent and charming girls she had ever encountered.

It was still quite early, and they had the shore almost to themselves. The boasted "esplanade," which, from end to end, was not so long as many a modern railway platform, was full half-a-mile away. Some children with their attendants were busy gathering shells and pebbles; a fisherman was spreading his nets upon some stakes that would soon be covered with the tide; and one solitary figure paced—a dark, diminishing speck—to the headland which shut in the bay. Mrs. Grandison thought she could not do better than improve the occasion by having a little chat with Miss Shrosbery. The Countess had rather excited her curiosity, and she was naturally of an inquiring disposition. Also she wanted to divert her mind from certain painful reflections, which had possessed it for the last few days. Her husband had gone up to town "on important business;" the truth being that more than one bubble had burst, more than one endeavour to make haste to be rich had suddenly come to naught, the consequences being present inconvenience and possible disaster of no limited extent—if the worst should come to the worst. So the speculator had flown to the scene of action, to find, at least, a stop-gap, if not a remedy; and his wife remained at Southbourne in a state of painful and hourly increasing anxiety. Never before had the issues been so tremendous, never before had the danger been so imminent!

In a mood of extreme despondency, Mrs. Grandison had risen betimes from her sleepless bed, and gone out to try if the fresh air, and the sunshine of a lovely autumn morning, would exorcise the demons that possessed her. The pleasant breezes cooled her aching, burning forehead; the sight and sound of the waves, rising and falling monotonously, soothed her restless spirit, and the soft voice of Susan seemed to have a strangely calming effect. "Shall I disturb you, if I sit here for a little while?" she said, as she seated herself on the ledge of a rock at Susan's side.

"Not at all; I am afraid my reading is only a pretence—there is so much to attract one in the open book of nature. Is it not a lovely morning?"

"Very much so. I never remember so fine an October."

"Summer is bestowing upon us her latest smiles ere she

departs to other climes. This is a sort of English-Indian summer, I suppose."

"I suppose so; they would call it that in America. We sometimes speak of it as 'St. Luke's little summer.'"

"That is because St. Luke's Day occurs about this time, I imagine. We must make the best of the fine weather while it lasts; any morning we may wake up to storm and rain, and blasts that chill one like winter winds. This autumnal loveliness is always brief and uncertain, I think."

"That may be said of all kinds of loveliness, Miss Shrosbery. At least, that is my sad experience. I never set my heart upon anything, but I fail to win it, or, winning it, keep it but a little space. Whatever I rejoice in passes away; that which I hold most closely slips from my grasp; it is always the same—'*all that's bright must fade!*' It is a sad world—a world of shadows, and disappointments, and loss, and miserable delusions!"

"But it is a world of hope, and a world of much happiness, too."

"Ah, my dear, you are young; you have never known care, and worry, and despondency. Wait twenty years, till you have fought the battle of life, and feel that the day is going against you, that the evening is coming fast, that all will soon be lost, that the hopes and promises of the morning were but mocking and deceitful voices. Then tell me, or rather tell those who are round about you, that it is a world of happiness!"

She spoke with so much fervour, and with so much sadness, her voice faltering, and the tears gathering in her eyes, that Susan at once felt that this was no mere vain talk, no peevish and conventional abuse of a world too fondly worshipped, too often unsatisfactory. There was deep and bitter sorrow in Mrs. Grandison's lament; it was evident that in life's weary conflict she was getting the worst of it, and that she was very, very tired, and longing for rest, on almost any terms.

Susan was thoughtful for a moment or two. She covered her face with her hands, and Mrs. Grandison fancied she must be saying a little prayer. What a very strange girl she really was! No wonder that she should be called a Methodist! And you must remember that, in those days,

it was, indeed, a term of reproach. No one—that is, no truly religious person—now minds being called a Methodist, for Methodism holds it own, and is in good repute, all the world over. Indeed, Religion generally goes in silk attire and silver slippers. But it was far otherwise in the days of which I am writing.

“Well!” said Mrs. Grandison, as Susan’s quiet face was once more visible, “are you going to tell me that this is a world of content and happiness? that this human life of ours is sweet and glad? that, in short, we live in continual sunshine—in Arcadia?”

“About Arcadia, I do not know,” said Susan, with her peaceful smile; “but I do know that there is much happiness in the world; that it is a very good world, and that God meant it to be so; that every bitter has its sweet, and every sadness its gladness, too. I know, also, that the sunshine is continuous, although clouds come between it and us—very dark clouds, sometimes; but the sunshine—the pure, glorious sunshine of our God’s eternal love and mercy—is still there, as it has been from all eternity, as it will be for ever and ever.”

“Ah, yes! but *that* sunshine is not for all—it is only for those who are extremely pious and devout; for those who have given up the world, as the phrase goes.”

“It is a phrase I excessively dislike. We have no right to ‘give up’ the world in any sense. God has put us here to do good and to receive good; and it is ours to choose the good and reject the evil that is in the world—in God’s world, for it is *His* world, not the devil’s, as many people seem to think. That is what my aunt always said. If anything could make her angry, it was to hear this world abused; it seemed to her like charging God with blunders. ‘Dear me,’ I have heard her say to a dismal Christian we used to know, ‘if I make you a handsome present, and you spoil it, is it any fault of mine, or is the present in itself less worthy? Do you come and tell me it is good for nothing—a marred, fouled, useless piece of workmanship, only fit to be burned? If you did, I should tell you that you were foolish and ungrateful, that the gift was no more to be blamed than the giver, and that the fault lay entirely with yourself alone.’ No, Mrs. Grandison, I cannot say

that the world is a bad world nor a wretched world. People talk about 'a howling wilderness,' you know, and they seem to think they are talking in a very Christian-like way; but it is they who howl to please themselves, while they ought to be making the best of the wilderness till it flourishes and blossoms like the rose."

"But that *sunshine* you spoke of—is it for all?"

"For all who will lift up their eyes. Faith will pierce the darkest cloud that ever hid that sun. It is only to look and be saved."

"Look *where*—at what?"

"At God our Father, the Giver of all good gifts. At God, as we see Him in His Son, Jesus Christ, by whom we come to God, in whom we find pardon, and peace, and rest to our souls."

"Rest and peace! Ah, Miss Shrosbery, those are sweet words. Shall I *ever* find them, do you think?"

"You certainly will, if you seek for them. Nay, they will come to you, unsought, if only you seek Christ. For with pardon come rest and peace, as surely as water comes with the advancing tide. And something more than this—joy!—the joy that cometh with the morning, when the soul awakes to find itself *at one* with God, through Jesus Christ, the only Way, the eternal Truth, the Life everlasting."

"Miss Shrosbery, I think you must be very happy."

"Yes, I am," replied Susan, simply. "Even when I am unhappy, I am still happy, if you know what I mean."

"I think I do. When the trials of life come and bow you down, and make your heart ache, you are still happy in something within and beyond."

"Ah, that is just it! I expressed myself so stupidly, but you quite understand. There is still, in all sorrow, the joy 'that no man taketh from you.' There is the peace 'which passeth all understanding.' There is the hope 'which maketh not ashamed.' Don't you know those beautiful words: 'Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no

herd in the stalls ; yet *I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation* ' ? ”

“ I am ashamed to say I do not know them. Are they in the Bible ? ”

“ They are in the Old Testament. They were uttered by one of the saints of old time, when God had not yet spoken by His Son. And David, in the same Psalm in which he says, ‘ Vain is the help of man,’ cries exultingly, ‘ O God ! my heart is fixed : I will sing, and give praise, even with my glory ! ’ ”

“ It must be something worth having, that inward sense of calm and settled happiness, which the world outside can never touch. How *shall* I gain it ? ”

“ You have but to desire it truly, and it is yours. You have only to ask, and it will be given, for God waits to be gracious.”

“ I will ask—I do ask Him. But is there nothing to do—nothing to yield ? ”

“ There is a great deal both to do and to yield ; but it comes quite easily when the heart is once given to God. You can’t help *doing*, if you love ; and it costs little, comparatively, to give up what displeases a dear and honoured friend. Love is such a conqueror ! And the service that is forced, that is not the service of love ; the obedience that is rendered only because one is afraid of *consequences*, and seeks to be delivered from them, is all in vain. God makes no sordid bargain with the repentant sinner, but He says, ‘ Give Me thine heart ; ’ and when that is given, all is given. All the rest—light, and joy, and peace, and obedience, and all good works—follow as naturally as daylight follows dawn.”

They parted, these two, who had never met in speech before, who met but a very few times more on earth. But the great work was done—the cloud of unbelief, of foolish pride and vain ambition, was fast melting in the blessed, life-giving sunshine ; for Mrs. Grandison walked home with this prayer on her lips, and in her heart of hearts : “ Oh, my God, make me to love Thee ! Make me to serve Thee, as Thy loving child. Make me happy, and let me find my rest, now and for evermore, in Thee.”

CHAPTER XXV.

ON THE MERE-SIDE.

Our wills are ours, we know not how;
Our wills are ours to make them Thine."

It was almost winter when, at last, Clarissa went back to Orwell, and Susan, for the first time, saw the splendid home of her stepmother. To the great joy of Clarissa, her father returned from Scotland as soon as the first snow was on the ground. It was an unusually severe season; the lake in the park, the river, and the ponds were all well frozen over, and everywhere skating was the order of the day. The Countess had assembled a large party in honour of Christmas, but the two girls remained, as before, very much in retirement; and the Earl, though perfectly courteous to his guests, joined but little in the festivities which were going on, and spent a good deal of time in the seclusion of his own library, or in his daughter's apartments. The more he saw of Susan Shrosbery, the more he appreciated the sweetness and sincerity of her character. He was very glad that his little Clarissa should have secured so close and dear a friend, and he hoped most ardently that Susan would not, at the close of her minority, which was very near at hand, make any arrangements for a speedy change of residence.

One bitter afternoon in January all the world went skating, and Susan, and, for a wonder, Clarissa, were included in the party. Clarissa, accustomed from early childhood to the exercise, glided over the ice as easily and swiftly as a bird moves through the air, very much to the envy of some of the Countess's young-lady visitors, who were feebly trusting to chairs, and hanging on to coat skirts, and coming perpetually to grief, in spite of every precaution.

"How do you manage it?" said one and another, as

Lady Clarissa paused at last to take breath. "Do tell us how you balance yourself so nicely."

"I really cannot," said Clarissa, smiling, her eyes sparkling, and her cheeks all a-glow; "it came to me when I was quite a child: don't be dreadfully shocked, but the gardener's boy gave me my first lessons! And I was such a mite, and so fearless, and so fond of outdoor exercise, that I took to it as a duck takes to swimming. I never had any difficulty, and then, for many years, I had the water all to myself, so I had every chance of growing perfect from practice."

"And perfect you are! I wish I could imitate your motion," said a tall girl, who was only two or three years older than Clarissa, and of whom she knew very little, owing to the strict rule of seclusion imposed by Lady Orwell. "Do you know," she resumed, "I fancied you were quite a child, not much the elder of Lord Fordham?"

"I am the elder by more than eight years."

"Then you must be fifteen or sixteen?"

"I shall be sixteen next birthday. Do I look such a child?"

"No, indeed, I should have taken you for a girl in the schoolroom, just beginning to contemplate your *début*. But how is it you never come down to dinner, or at least appear in the drawing-room during the evening?"

"School-girls always dine in the schoolroom, do they not?"

"Not invariably, when they are your age. And they generally spend their evenings in the drawing-room. I always did, from the time I was twelve years old. Mamma said it would give me confidence; she had no notion of mewing me up with a cross old governess. Girls are so shy and awkward, if they are kept quite in the background till they actually come out. Don't you think so?"

"I am sure I cannot tell; I am no judge, for I know no girls. Lady Orwell does not approve of school-girl friendships; they interfere with one's studies, she believes—and then she says they are sure to chatter so much nonsense."

"I dare say she is right; all girls talk nonsense in their

turn—I am sure my sisters and I talked plenty, and we are none the worse for it.”

“I suppose it depends upon the sort of nonsense—a little fun cannot possibly be wrong, but downright foolishness must always be amiss. My late governess used to say that only clever people are capable of talking good nonsense. And I have heard, too, that *les sots ne savent pas rire*.”

“What a pleasant, ladylike person your present governess seems to be, and on what excellent terms you are with her! She is rather young, though, for the situation.”

“My governess! I have none. Madame Pierrot, who was with me I forget how many years, went away last summer. I am studying now by myself, or, rather, with Miss Shrosbery.”

“That young lady in mourning, whom Lord Orwell is taking in hand? Ah! I thought she was your governess, as she did not come to dinner, and you always seemed to be with her. But, of course, your papa would not pay so much attention to a mere governess.”

“Papa would pay attention to anyone whom he thought needed it. He was always most kind and polite to Madame Pierrot. But Miss Shrosbery and I are half-sisters—at least, that is what we call ourselves. Really and truly, I suppose, we are no more related than you and I are; and yet we have one stepmother.”

“How curious! I never can understand the complications of relationships. When I get beyond first cousins, I am always puzzled. I quite thought my uncle’s wife’s brother was legally my uncle, till the other day, when he wished to marry me, and then I found out that he was no manner of kinsman to me, and no more within the prohibited degrees, than the Khan of Tartary, or any other gentleman who is not conscious of my existence.”

“And shall you marry him?” asked Clarissa, with the utmost simplicity.

“No; because I do not care for him. And I am in no hurry to be married; my home-life is very happy. Papa is the dearest old dad, and mamma is——well! just the very best mamma in the world! We girls can only have our girlhood once, and for a short time; married life,

once commenced, goes on to the end of the chapter. But tell me now, Lady Clarissa, do you ever think of being married?"

"Yes, I do," replied Clarissa gravely. "As it is the fate of most girls to marry, I suppose all girls do think of marriage, when they are beginning to feel themselves grown up. But I never talked about it till I had Susan. Madame Pierrot says young ladies in France never speak or even *think* of marriage till they are introduced to the future husband as his *fiancée*, everything being already arranged by the parents—or, rather, by the two mammas; for it seems that if you have no voice in your own marriage, you have unlimited sway over your sons and daughters, when their time arrives."

"It is quite true. To our English notions it seems detestable. There is the question of the *dot* and the settlement, and all is concluded; it is dreadfully like being sold! But who is Susan?"

"Miss Shrosbery. Mamma, you know, was Mrs. Shrosbery before she became Lady Orwell, and Susan was Mr. Shrosbery's only child. Her own mother died when she was quite a little thing; she does not even remember so much of her as I do of mine. An aunt in the South of England brought her up; she is lately dead, and Susan lives with us; so now you understand."

"Thank you, I do. I hope you do not think me very inquisitive, but I always like to know who people are when I am staying in the house with them. Pray do not tell Miss Shrosbery I took her for the governess."

"She would not be in the least offended. She would turn governess to-morrow, if need were, and not be ashamed; and so would I. Why should anyone be ashamed of working honestly and honourably for a living?"

"Well, I suppose one need not be ashamed. But a woman who does anything to gain a living loses *caste*, you know."

"Then I should lose it with a great deal of pleasure. There must be many things in life far worse than working for one's living, and I should imagine very few things better than working for those one loved. And I

do not think God intends any person, man or woman, to lead a useless life."

"You have very singular notions for so young a girl. I feel as if I were talking to a person much older than myself. But you said you talked to Susan—I beg pardon; Miss Shrosbery—about being married. Would you mind telling me her views on the subject?"

"I hardly know what her 'views' are. But we were talking about our future, and naturally enough into that future came the thought of marriage; and I, rather foolishly, I must own, asked her if she *meant* to marry."

"Of course she does; every girl does, unless she is a Roman Catholic, destined to take the veil. What did she answer?"

"She said she would marry, if it were God's good will; if it were not, she would be quite content to lead a single life, and expend upon many the affection which might have been concentrated on a few."

"What a curious answer! To think of putting it in that way!—'If it were God's good will!'"

"But if it were not God's good will, it could not be, you know. Everything is as God wills it, and God knows best what will make us happy. All married people are not happy." And Clarissa sighed, thinking of her own father.

"But that is illogical, is it not? You say God knows what will make us happy, and yet He lets people marry, knowing it will be for their unhappiness. I do not understand."

"Nor I, either. I suppose it is always difficult to understand God's Providence. Indeed, I suppose we never shall understand it in this world; we must wait till life is done. But do you not think people sometimes take their affairs in their own hands, and so rush wilfully upon their own unhappiness? And then God lets them do it, that they may learn the secret of true happiness. Is not that it, Miss Dennis?"

"I dare say it is; but I never thought. Of course I believe in Providence, like any other person brought up in a Christian way. Still I do not know that I ever

looked upon my own life as being settled for me ; and yet I suppose it is."

"It is surely, and yet it would seem that a great deal is left to ourselves. It is a great mystery ! I suppose the right way is to do always what our conscience tells us is the right thing, and when the way is doubtful to ask God to guide us and lead us, and always take what comes from His hand cheerfully."

"Do you know, Lady Clarissa, I never had such a grave conversation with anyone before ? And yet, when I stopped you, you seemed to be skating as merrily as a child."

"I was in a very merry mood, for I had just cut such a funny figure on the ice. There is no harm in being merry, is there ?"

"Oh, dear, no ; I should say not. Only I cannot reconcile your air of simple amusement with your serious discourse. You seem to me at once so much younger and so much older than myself, and I may say so much wiser."

"I am wise, then, with Susan's wisdom, for I think I have been quoting her all along. And all her wisdom she declares is second-hand, for she got it from the aunt who is lately dead, and who was just as good as she was wise."

"I must get you to introduce me to Susan ; I shall be all the better for a little of her second-hand wisdom and for a little more of yours, which, according to your own account, is but *third-hand*. And now, will you not give me a skating lesson ? We shall be scolded if we stand here any longer."

"While we are talking wisdom, we are acting un-wisdom, I am afraid," said Clarissa with a laugh, as she sped to the other end of the pool. When she came back again she began to teach Miss Dennis, but that young lady made slow progress, and could scarcely manage to keep her feet at all. It was not her fault, for she tried hard to imitate the movements of her teacher ; but in order to be a good skater one must be perfectly well made, and naturally lithe and supple, which Miss Dennis, poor young woman, was *not*. All the dancing-masters in the

world would never have made her dance gracefully; all her attempts to skate like Lady Clarissa were sure to end in failure. Dancers and skaters, like poets, are born, not made.

Meanwhile, another conversation was going on on the opposite bank of the Mere. Susan's skating, though better than Miss Dennis's, was by no means a success, and very soon she was tired, and felt a pain in her side, which warned her to take rest. Though far from unhealthy, Susan was not strong; she had an idea that she inherited her mother's tendency to consumption, and she thought it a duty to be careful, and try to preserve the life and strength which God had given her. Her aunt had always taught her that the health of the body is by no means to be disregarded, and that common sanitary laws are never with impunity to be set at nought; neither would she ever permit her, as a child, to gratify her inclinations at the expense of prudence.

"You are pale," said Lord Orwell, as he assisted her up the bank; "is it the cold, or are you tired?"

"I am tired, I think; the air, though so cold, is clear and dry, and my furs are very warm. Skating is such hard work, when you are continually tumbling down and getting up again. Look at Clarissa! She is like a bird on the wing."

"I do not remember the time when she did not skate quite as well as she does now. Skating is either very hard work, or else no work at all. Let us walk up and down by the rushes; it is too cold for standing still, and the sun is setting."

They walked a little while in silence, or simply making remarks upon the skaters, till at length the Earl said, somewhat abruptly, "Susan, do you believe in presentiments?"

"I am not sure," she replied, thoughtfully. "They often come to nothing, you know; and then we forget them. It is only when our forebodings are accomplished that we dwell upon them, or connect them with events."

"True; quite true! But sometimes one has impressions which it is impossible to shake off. Do you not know what I mean?"

"I know very well, for it was about this time last year that there fell upon me a sort of shadow—an undefined fear—a dim sense of something impending. I felt that some change was coming—and it came!"

"But was there nothing to indicate the nature of the change? Were there not appearances which justified your vague apprehensions?"

"I suppose there were, though I was not conscious of it at the time. Something seemed to say that my life at Buttermeads—which was all the life I could remember—was drawing to a close. I feared, without quite knowing why, that my dear, happy home would soon be broken up."

"Still your fears would have some grounds?"

"Probably they had. My dear aunt seemed no more delicate than she had been for years, and yet—yet I did not feel satisfied about her. And I could not help thinking, as I looked at her, Suppose she should be taken away? suppose God should call her very soon to Himself?"

"There were probably some signs of decay which insensibly alarmed you; illness—especially final illness—sometimes steals most insidiously on those who have been merely delicate for years. It was so in the case of Clarissa's mother. You will wonder why I talk in this strain. I will tell you, only it must be a profound secret between us, for I do not wish to be laughed at, even though I may choose to laugh a little at myself. I have a presentiment! I feel as if I had got to the end of everything; and I have been dreaming strangely and so vividly of my wife Clarissa! Do you think I am too foolish?"

"By no means; one cannot help a presentiment of this sort; though, at the same time, I *think* one ought not to yield to it. But now I shall turn the tables upon you, and ask if nothing has occurred to cause the apprehension; do you find your health at all failing?"

"Not in the least! I never felt better in my life; I have not an ache or a pain, and I am less fatigued after a hard day's hunting than any man of my years whom I know; I am not intemperate, and I always keep clear of

infectious disorders. I am not quite fifty, as I think you know; and a man of sound constitution ought to be in his prime at fifty. No, I am not conscious of any weakness. I sleep as well, eat as well, and exercise as well as ever I did. I scarcely know what indisposition means. I suppose I ought to add—thank God! But for all that, and in spite of every effort to fling off the idea, it haunts me like a spectre. As I stand here, I think, Another winter will come; the Mere will be frozen over as it is now; the snow will lie white and deep on the ploughed fields—as it lies *now*—see! the skaters will come here again, and there will be the same glee and merriment as now I hear around me; and the old church clock will strike the hour, as it strikes it now—listen!—one, two, three, four!—but I shall not be here! Long ere another winter steals upon another fading autumn I shall be gone—I know not where!—to that mysterious world into which mortals travel when body and soul part company. In short, Susan, it is a case of—

“ ‘I hear a voice you cannot hear,
Which says I must not stay;
I see a hand you cannot see,
Which beckons me away!’ ”

“My dear lord, you are nervous. Something has unhinged you.”

“I am not nervous; and if I am unhinged, as you say, I am not aware of it. And I never had a fit of the *blues* in my life before! But you will not mention this confession of mine to any living creature?”

“Surely not, I promise you.”

“Above all, not to Clarissa?”

“No, indeed, poor child! Were your sad forebodings to be realised, it would be trouble enough for her without any suffering from previous disquietude.”

“Clarissa is my greatest anxiety—my only one, I may safely say. My life has not been so happy of late years that I should care greatly to prolong it. As soon as ever the weather changes I shall go up to town.”

“You will consult a physician? I think it is only wise to do so.”

“I think it would be only foolish to do so, knowing

and feeling, as I do, that I am in perfect health! No, I shall consult my lawyer. Do you know, Susan, I have made no will?"

"Then I think, my lord, you ought to make one without delay. It is a duty we owe to those who come after us, to leave things straight and clear. And, presentiment or no presentiment, life is uncertain!"

"‘Here to-day, and gone to-morrow,’ as my ‘uncle Toby’ said. Yes! life *is* uncertain! The best life is of doubtful tenure. We don’t want the parsons nor the moralists to tell us *that*! One does not live to be fifty without beholding many of one’s compeers cut down like the flower when the mower’s scythe goes through the grass. I *ought* to have made my will long ere this. I had fully purposed doing it when I was in London last year; but partly by mischance, and partly through carelessness, the good intention was frustrated. It is all of a piece with the rest of my thoughtless, selfish, inconsequent career."

"I wonder Mr. Hadfield never urged it upon you. He insists upon my making a proper will as soon as I shall be of age."

"And quite right, too; you will not die a day the sooner because you dispose of your property in due legal form, instead of leaving it to be squabbled and fought for by distant heirs-at-law, and wasted on inevitable legal expenses. But Hadfield is not to blame. He has pressed upon me again and again the absolute necessity of my making some provision for Clarissa."

"You do not mean to tell me that at this moment there is no provision for Clarissa?"

"Absolutely none! If I were to die to-day, Clarissa would be as penniless as the daughter of a workhouse pauper. She would be dependent on the charity of her stepmother."

"But—excuse me, Lord Orwell—how can that be?"

"Don’t you know, child? I was ruined; I made ducks and drakes of my goodly inheritance—*somehow*! For the life of me I cannot exactly tell *how* I managed it. But I did manage it, and the result was—I married money! Yes! I know I was a scamp! I had no business to collar

your father's rich hoards, though I did it legally enough ; and if I had not married his widow, someone else less scrupulous, perhaps, than myself would have done it. After all, it was a tolerably fair exchange ; she got the title she pined for—I got the money I required ; I fancy she had the best of the bargain, after all ! Well, Susan, the first thing I did was to put myself straight, to redeem my estates, to pay off my creditors, &c., &c. Then there remained a certain sum which I could appropriate as I pleased. Some of it is lying now at my banker's, and I want to settle it securely on my eldest daughter. It is all I *can* leave her. Orwell and other estates go with the title ; Fordham *must* take them—they are his indubitably ; certain properties and funds are entailed on our second son, and the rest are splendidly provided for by the terms of the marriage settlement. Clarissa can only take what I leave her—the residue of certain moneys which I have saved, for I have not been personally extravagant of late years.”

“Why delay the business a day longer ? It does not need a lawyer to draw up a will.”

“It does not generally, I own. But in this case I can do nothing without Hadfield, for I really do not know precisely what is mine to bequeath to whom I will, irrespective of the marriage settlement. As I told you, I quite meant to do all that was necessary while I was in town, and Hadfield at my service. But, somehow, I put it off from day to day—every now and then I forgot all about it ; and when, at last, I did go to Hadfield's office to give him the necessary instructions, and to make needful inquiries, he had just left with Mrs. Hadfield for the seaside. It was all my own fault. I knew he would leave London at a certain date, but it slipped my memory. So once more the arrangement of poor Clarissa's fortunes was deferred, and, till the other day, I do declare, I thought no more about it. Now, it strikes me, suppose—only suppose, you know—that *anything should happen*, that these presentiments of mine should mean anything, Clarissa would be a beggar ! She could not claim one penny of mine, nor anything at all, except a few jewels that belonged to her own mother.”

"I do not believe in your presentiment; but I shall be uneasy till you tell me the will is properly executed, and safe in Mr. Hadfield's keeping. I hope you will not delay."

"Not an hour longer than I can help. As soon as ever the snow is off the ground, I will advise Hadfield of my coming, and bid him prepare a draft of some kind. Now let us go in; my teeth chatter, and your cheeks are blue, instead of red."

"They never are red; I am constitutionally pale, which makes strangers fancy I am delicate."

"I should say you were not over-strong."

"No, I am not. I often think my life will not be a long one; my mother died at thirty, and I am like her in every respect."

"Do you not wish for a long life?"

"No! not in the sense you mean. Why should I when I know that mine is the life everlasting?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE HUNTSMAN'S LEAP.

" . . . they are all—the meanest things that are—
As free to live, and to enjoy that life,
As God was free to form them at the first,
Who in His sovereign wisdom made them all.
Ye, therefore, who love mercy, teach your sons
To love it, too."

It was some days before the frost broke up, and then followed a heavy fall of snow, which lay deep and unsullied on the face of the East Anglian country. It was quite the middle of February when a thaw at last set in, and something like a flattering promise of spring was breathed in the pleasant sunshine, and the comparatively

warm South wind. The party at the Castle, long detained by stress of weather, separated, all but two or three who were particular friends of the Countess, and who, moreover, had not received other or more eligible invitations; the children all had dreadful coughs and colds, and their lady-mother herself fell a victim to the fashionable malady—influenza. And last, not least, Lord Orwell prepared for his journey to town, and the day was fixed, a later one than was at first intended, in order that he might not miss a certain run across country, in his capacity of Master of the Eastshire Hounds. The Countess being invalided, and out of the way, his lordship insisted on both Susan and Clarissa riding to the meet, together with other ladies of the county, who would be present.

It was a splendid morning—mild, but fresh; the sky was dappled over here and there with light, fleecy cloud-lets, which betokened wind ere long; and *that*, several people remarked, would not be unwelcome, provided it did not blow great guns; for the ground, after the long, intense frost, was uncomfortably soft, and there was more mud than was at all agreeable either to walkers or to riders.

“We shall have nicely splashed habits by the time we get back home,” said Susan, as she and Clarissa cantered briskly along a lane, where the mire was wonderfully plentiful, even for miry February.

“Yes; but how delicious it is to be on horseback again! And after that bitter cold that pinched our fingers, and turned our noses blue, it feels quite summer-like. A little later we shall find violets under that hedge—I am not sure that we should not find a few now, if we were to search; and that bank yonder, under the great oak, is all starred over with primroses in the month of April. And lower down there are ferns,—delicate spleenworts,—and the finest lady-ferns I ever found anywhere.”

“I know so little of wild flowers! When I listen to you I am ashamed to think how ignorant I am for a country-bred maiden; and I have often heard botanists extolling the flora of the district about Buttermeads. You shall teach me botany; I am fast catching the enthusiasm.”

“That will be delightful, though I must warn you that

I am not far advanced in the science. Madame cared little about it, but she got me some good books to study. I am principally self-taught. However, all I know you shall know, if you choose. We will begin on a snowdrop directly we get home."

"If we are not too tired! I am afraid I shall not be good for much save lounging, by the time the ride is over. It is a long way, I heard Lord Orwell say, to Packer's Green, where the hounds meet."

"We can turn back, if you are really tired; we need not go all the way. Some of the ladies follow the huntsmen for a few fields, but papa would never allow us to do so, even if we wished it. He thinks it is neither safe nor feminine for a lady to ride across country, like a man."

"And I agree with him. I am not quite sure I *like* the sport, Clarissa; it is called 'manly,' but I doubt whether it truly deserves the epithet. It seems to me that the odds are too great against a defenceless animal. There are those men, and their horses and the dogs, all bent on the torture and destruction of a single creature, who has no chance of ultimate escape. I always honour that boy in the story, who braved the squire's horsewhip, rather than betray the hare, who was being coursed to death."

"You do not think hunting is *wrong*?"

"I should not like to say it was, because I am not a judge, and there are a great many excellent men, I know, who enjoy a good day's sport with the harriers or the foxhounds. But I could not do it myself, if I were a man—at least, I think not. I cannot see that, as Christian people, we have any right to amuse ourselves with the sufferings of any of God's creatures; we have no more right to persecute hares and foxes than dogs and horses."

"But, my dear Susan, the game must be kept down. If all the hares lived unmolested, what would become of the farmers? And foxes are most mischievous animals."

"Foxes and hares must die, like sheep and oxen, but they need not be hunted to death. What would be thought of a butcher who ran his lambs down with dogs? I do not see much difference, except that it is prescriptive so to kill timid hares, and it is against all precedent so to destroy innocent lambs."

"And perhaps hunted lambs would not be very good to eat?"

"I dare say not; it is bad policy, as well as cruelty, to over-drive animals that are for the meat-market; but I believe a hare that is coursed is said to be superior in flavour to one that is simply shot."

"Yes, and venison, too, is always the tenderer and nicer for being run down, keepers and sportsmen tell us."

"It may be so, but it is certainly most unmerciful. And what right have we to make any creature suffer for the whims of epicures? No, I cannot think that Christian people ought to encourage it."

"And yet we are here, riding to the meet—giving at least a tacit approval by our presence."

"I did not think of it when we started; I only thought of the ride, and of seeing the hunters in their red coats, and the beautiful horses, and the dogs—I forgot the fox, poor wretch! I will not do it again. For, you see, when a thing seems wrong to oneself, it is wrong, though it does not follow that it is wrong in those who really hold the opposite opinion. It is just a case, I think, in which one must follow the dictates of conscience, and obey the precept of the Master—'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'"

"See, Susan! there is papa beckoning us on; we are falling too far behind. Let us have a brisk canter—we are out of the lane now, and the high road is dry and firm, comparatively. Oh! I do enjoy this bright sunshine and the breeze. I don't know when I have felt in such spirits. I am always happy on horseback, but it is so much nicer to have a companion. I hope papa will not stay long in London. Orwell will seem so dull when he is gone. Oh dear! what a difference it has made to me, since I knew that papa loved me!—of course, he loved me before, but I did not know it, you see. It was about this time last year, a little later, that I found it out; then we went to town, and I saw and heard all sorts of delightful things, and then you came to be my sister, and then there was that pleasant time at Southbourne. Oh, Susan dear! it has been a most happy year,—the happiest in all my life! Ah, forgive me! I forgot that my happy year

brought you your great sorrow! How easy it is to be selfish, even towards those we love!"

"Very easy, but I do not think you were selfish in speaking as you did. And I hope, dear, that the year that is gone may be the earnest of many happy years yet to come. Hark! What is that noise?"

"They are off! The fox is found; don't you hear the dogs give tongue? And that is the huntsman's cry! We are too late. Yes! there they go, right over hedge and ditch; the fox will run into Pulham Spinney. No! he is taking to Rushmeads side; he will give the gentlemen some stiff riding, if he goes in that direction; there are some of the awkwardest leaps, papa says, in the lands beyond the brook."

They rested awhile, watching the hunt as it swept over hill and dale, till the last patch of scarlet was lost in the far sunshiny distance, and then the two girls turned their horses' heads, and rode leisurely home to Orwell Castle. They lunched downstairs by themselves, for all the visitors were in the field, and the Countess, whose influenza was at its height, kept her room. Only Lord Fordham and the Honourable Augustus disturbed them, from time to time, by their abrupt incursions and raids upon the table, although the nursery dinner was only just concluded. Neither Susan nor Clarissa ventured more than a mild reproof; the Countess had published an edict, that no one save herself should ever scold, threaten, or reprimand her "lambs"—the consequence being that they were universally pronounced "unbearable" by servants, visitors, and members of the family.

The boys had to be bribed at last by their nurse, who was afraid they would do some terrible mischief, for which she would be blamed; and when they had left the room, Susan said, gravely, "I could not have imagined that children would behave so ill—so very ill! If one could only get some sort of hold upon them! there must be some way of influencing them, surely?"

"I am afraid there is not; or, if there were, their mamma would quickly denounce it. I have tried so often with Fordham, and Augustus, and Sydney, and I have found that neither patience nor petting is of any

avail. The others are mere babies, but they are as unruly and defiant as the elder ones. Oh! what would it be to live continually with them!"

"As they are now, a veritable purgatory! How is it the servants will bear it?"

"They do not for any length of time; we are always changing servants, who 'can't put up' with one or another or all of them. For, you see, they do not, even when the house is full of company, live in the nursery-quarters as children in their class of life usually do. When papa is at home, there is something like order, for he will not have the whole house overrun and turned topsyturvy. They are going to have a governess. How I pity her!"

"So do I! But no governess will stay at Orwell; one had better do rough house-work, or stand at the wash-tub, than take charge of unruly children, over whom one has not, and cannot have, the least control."

"If a governess did succeed in gaining any control, she would not be suffered to keep it. The Countess is extremely jealous of any influence exceeding her own. But papa says Fordham shall have a tutor."

The afternoon passed quickly away; Susan was obliged to rest, but Clarissa busied herself with her painting. Both the young ladies were commanded by the Earl to appear at dinner that day; the guests were few, and the Countess would not be present. I am afraid he rather enjoyed the prospect of her absence from the head of the table, and he would scarcely have been distressed had perpetual influenza detained her in her own apartments. When the daylight failed, Clarissa threw down her brushes, and went to dress for the first time in her life for the late dinner. Her intuitive good sense, as well as her taste, led her to make a very simple toilet, but she was some time in deciding which of her dresses "would please papa the best." The lamps were lighted everywhere, when at last she came down into the large, empty drawing-room to watch for the return of the hunters.

When Susan made her appearance, she said, "I went to your room, but you were gone; I was so tired and lazy, that my *siesta* extended itself into the dressing-hour,

and so I was rather late. But I am quite in time, I find; the gentlemen are not returned."

"No! I suppose they have had an extra long run. Dinner will have to be put back, if they do not soon arrive. I knew there would be stiff work, if the fox once got into that broken ground beyond the brook."

"Poor animal! It is my low birth and breeding, I am afraid, Clarissa; but I should be delighted to hear that the fox had won the day."

"If he escaped now, his sentence would not be the less certain. He would only be reprieved—till the next opportunity! Reynard must die, and the hounds must be in at the death, Susan. It is written in the huntsman's book of Fate."

"I suppose so. But all the same my sympathies go with Reynard, in spite of his undue affection for the good-wife's grey goose. What beautiful coral ornaments you are wearing!"

"They were my own mamma's! Papa gave them to me on my last birthday. I have never worn them before. You don't think I am at all over-dressed, Susan?"

"Not in the least. You would be rather dowdy but for your necklace and pendant. The rich crimson suits your dark hair and eyes, and your olive skin; but you have lost the glow you had after your ride; I fancy you were rather over-tired too, and you ought not to have painted so long."

"It is not that; I am not tired, but I am chilly—this dress is so much thinner than the merino I wear in mornings. And I believe—don't betray me, Susan; but I want my dinner."

"I do, most certainly, for I was too tired to make a good luncheon. Hark! do I not hear horses' feet?"

"It is too dark to see anything," said Clarissa, looking out behind the heavy window-curtain; "but I hear them, certainly. Yes! the tramp comes nearer, and here they are; they are crossing the carriage-sweep, and the grooms are coming out to take the horses round. When papa is alone, he generally goes round to the stables himself."

A few minutes more, and there was a good deal of noise in the hall; then all was still again, and the girls supposed that the gentlemen had gone to dress.

"Papa always takes a warm bath after hunting," said Clarissa. "It will be a good half-hour before they ring the second bell."

"Someone is coming now," said Susan.

And the next moment someone opened the door, and in came Colonel Fellowes, one of their nearest neighbours. He was just as he had dismounted, apparently; still in his hunting costume, and splashed from head to foot. For one instant the girls stood amazed; the next, it flashed upon them that there had been an accident; the Colonel did not appear before them in that plight without reason; besides, he was pale, and he looked strangely grave and sad.

"What is it?" asked Clarissa, bravely, though she shivered as she spoke. "You bring us bad news, Colonel Fellowes?"

"I am sorry to say I do. We have had an accident. Lord Orwell, for the first time in his hunting career, has come to grief. He has been thrown."

"How was it?"

"Cannot be sure. The animal must have caught his hind feet in the top rail of that awkward fence that divides the common from Allen's field. It is a rough sort of fence, half-hedge and half-rail, and it is a very nasty leap, and has been the downfall of many a bold huntsman. And to make matters worse, the ground to-day was rotten, and it gave way under the horse's hoofs. Poor Campo took the leap with his usual courage, but not with his usual address. Or perhaps your father, seeing the dangerous state of the bank on the other side, involuntarily tightened his curb-rein—though that is scarcely likely in so thorough and experienced a horseman. Anyhow, Campo faltered, cleared the ditch, and came down on the sloping ground beyond. The poor beast tried hard to right himself, but in vain; down he fell, and flung his rider, and, I am afraid, partly rolled over him."

"Is papa much hurt?"

"I hope not!—I hope not!" replied Colonel Fellowes, in that peculiar tone which convinces the listener that the speaker distrusts his words. "It was an ugly tumble, though. Farmer Harris and I picked him up. As for

poor Campo, all one could do for him was to put him out of his misery as fast as possible. We were going to take the Earl to Harris's farm; but while we debated the question, and tried to revive him, we luckily saw Dr. Hammond riding along the Cliffstone-road, and he, perceiving that he was wanted, came at once to offer his services, and he said it would be better that his lordship should be conveyed to the Castle. So we improvised a sort of litter, and brought him with all care."

"He is not *dead*?"

And Lady Clarissa turned ashen pale, looking into the Colonel's white and solemn face.

"No, no! Do not think of such a thing, Lady Clarissa. And I do trust the injury is not so great as we feared it might be. He has broken his arm, and Dr. Hammond thinks a rib or two; but arms and ribs can be mended, you know. The ugliest hurt, I am afraid, is that which shows least—it is on the *head*! The Doctor is with him now. He was carried straight to his own room."

"Can I go to him?"

"I think you had better not. You would only disturb Dr. Hammond in the examination which he must make. But there is the Countess to be considered; someone must tell her what has happened. Your ladyship would be the best person to convey the painful tidings."

"Oh no, not I!" replied Clarissa, shrinking as it were within herself. "Susan will do it so much better."

Susan acquiesced, glad to spare Clarissa a task which could not fail to add to her distress. There was no knowing in what spirit Lady Orwell might receive the mournful news; only, she would be sure, in some way, to wound her step-daughter's feelings.

Susan went to her at once, and found that she had already begun to wonder why the second bell did not ring, and to inquire if something unusual was not going on, for sounds of muffled feet had penetrated to her end of the corridor. To Susan's amazement she never seemed to imagine that any actual danger could be the result of the accident. Her husband had been reckless, as usual; she had warned him times without number of what would happen some day if he persisted in flying across country

like a jockey at a steeplechase, or a madman! And he, the father of a family, too! and fifty years of age, and riding over twelve stone! And now, what she predicted had come to pass, and she hoped it would be a lesson to him! He might break his neck next time! Finally, she supposed she was not wanted in the invalid's chamber, for the sight of blood and bruises always turned her sick and faint, and she was very ill as it was. She was pretty sure Dr. Hammond did not understand her case; it was something far worse than mere influenza that ailed her. And what was my lord's hurt after all?

Susan replied that she did not know particulars, but Colonel Fellowes had said an arm was broken, and several ribs fractured, and there was a bad bruise on the head.

"Serve him right!" exclaimed the affectionate wife. "A man of his age and weight, and the father of a young family, ought not to behave himself like a random lad without responsibilities! I hope after this he'll leave the hunt alone; or if he must go into the field, follow the hounds at a safe and rational pace. Well, I suppose you must say I am sorry—and so I am, of course; and tell him I will come and see him in the morning, if this hateful influenza will let me."

"I do not know that I shall be allowed to see his lordship, and at present no message can reach him, for he has not yet recovered consciousness."

"Is it so bad as that?" asked the Countess in a more subdued tone, and feeling a little stricken, as well she might. "Did you say Dr. Hammond was in attendance?"

"Yes; he was close to the hunt when the accident happened, and he came home with Lord Orwell."

"Tell him that I must see him before he leaves the house. Oh, dear! oh, dear! how nervous I feel! Insensible, is he? I don't like people to be insensible after a fall; I knew a man who fell from a scaffold, and he was insensible when they picked him up, and he never spoke again, but died the same day. And he left a wife and half-a-dozen little children, without bread to eat. Really, I have no patience with people exposing themselves to such dangers—it is inconsiderate, to say the least of it."

Whether Lady Orwell was blaming the man who fell

from the scaffold, or the Earl who was thrown from his hunter, Susan did not know. It was a comfort, however, to reflect that in any case Fordham and his brothers and sisters would have not only bread, but plenty of butter to it. And then she suddenly remembered the conversation she had had with the Earl by the Mere-side a fortnight ago. Should the nobleman fare no better than the hapless bricklayer, it might follow that Lady Clarissa would be left "without bread to eat," or at best with no other dependence than the bitter bread of charity!

CHAPTER XXVII.

MEDICINE AND LAW.

It was many hours before Lord Orwell regained consciousness, and even then he seemed scarcely to have the full command of his faculties. He spoke little, and that confusedly, and he dozed continually; he took what nourishment was offered, but asked no question concerning his present circumstances. The broken arm and ribs were set, and were going on well; there was surprisingly little pain, considering the nature of the injuries, and yet it was very evident that Dr. Hammond was far from satisfied, inasmuch as he suddenly despatched a special messenger to town, requiring the presence of that celebrated physician, Sir Samuel Sawyer, at Orwell Castle, that a consultation might be held on the state of the noble patient. It was what Colonel Fellowes called "that ugly hurt on the head," which caused the Doctor's anxiety. Susan, without saying anything, wrote to Mr. Hadfield, simply detailing the accident. That he would consider it necessary to come down immediately to Orwell, she felt tolerably sure. No one, unless it were Dr. Hammond, seemed to imagine the possibility of actual danger.

On the third day, both Susan and Clarissa were sitting

in the invalid's chamber. He took little notice of them, though he evidently recognised their presence, and once he asked for a cooling drink which had been ordered. Susan, who gave it to him, thought he was more flushed and feverish than she had seen him yet, and she asked Clarissa at what time Dr. Hammond might be expected.

"Not till evening," replied Clarissa. "He was summoned to Southfield this morning; but he will certainly be here as soon as Sir Samuel arrives. What is the matter, Susan?"

"I am afraid there is an access of fever, that is all."

Clarissa approached her father, and felt his hands and his head. Yes! there was certainly more fever; and when he opened his eyes, there was in them an unnatural lustre, which, even to his daughter's inexperience, seemed symptomatic of evil. All she could do was to put fresh ice to his head, and watch him anxiously, as apparently he dozed off again. While she sat motionless by the bedside, and Susan netted silently by the fire, there was a sudden clamour about the door; the handle was violently turned, and Lord Fordham burst noisily into the room, followed by his lady-mother. Clarissa started in dismay, for the most perfect quietude had been very emphatically enjoined; and Susan, without more ado, seized the young intruder, placed her hand on his mouth, and, with a gesture of command, was leading him back to the door, when the Countess, in her naturally high-pitched tones, exclaimed, "What are you doing? Leave my boy alone! A pretty thing if he cannot come and see his own papa!" And she took the child's arm, intending to free him from Susan's grasp.

But Miss Shrosbery was not so easily foiled, when she felt that her duty was clear before her. "He cannot, must not, stay here," she said, still keeping her hold on the boy-viscount, and speaking under her breath. "All depends upon my lord being undisturbed; Dr. Hammond forbids any needless sound. See! we have even laid down soft mould on the hearthstone, that the falling cinders may not be heard, and Clarissa and I replenish the fire with our own hands. He—the Doctor—said he would not answer for the consequences if there was the

slightest jar upon the nerves. Please let Lord Fordham go."

"No; I will not! Fordham has as good a right here as anybody; and better than most, I should say. You forget that he is the son and heir."

"Indeed, I do not; and if he were older and could restrain himself, his proper place would be here, undoubtedly. Dear Lady Orwell, don't you see that already my lord is disturbed and agitated?"

And, in fact, the invalid was beginning to mutter, and to turn and toss in his bed. Dr. Hammond had said that restlessness would be a bad, probably a fatal, sign! Suddenly, he opened wide his eyes, and fixed them on the Countess with such a vacant stare, that she was, in spite of herself, alarmed, and she lowered her voice instinctively, as she said, "Go now, my darling; I think perhaps you are better away; you shall come again when your poor pa is a little better."

"I won't go! *I won't!*" shouted Lord Fordham, at the top of his shrill childish voice. "You said I should see where he'd broke his head, and where they had tried to mend it! *I will* stay! I'm the son and heir, aren't I?"

"Yes, my own pet," replied his mother; "and you are ma's dear, sweet lamb, too; so you will go away when you're asked to, as good as gold, won't you, now?"

"No! *I won't!*" was the sturdy response. And when Lady Orwell laid her hand again upon him, he looked as vicious as a training colt that means to measure the strength of his rider. A disturbance in the sick-room appeared to be inevitable, and the Countess was fairly frightened at the storm she had provoked by her own folly and inconsideration. She had plenty of good sense, when she chose to give it play; and she quickly perceived that Susan was right, and that it was not a case that permitted trifling, or even indulgence of her own petty jealousies. But while she hesitated, not knowing how to take the next step safely, Susan walked into the dressing-room, where Alexander, my lord's "own man," was in attendance. He had heard the noise, and was utterly dismayed; for he had gone about like a pussy-cat for the last two days, and never raised his voice above a whisper. He, too, had

heard Dr. Hammond's injunctions, had done his best to obey them, even to stopping all the clocks in the corridor, and it needed now but a single word to bring him to action, *coûte qui coûte* ! So, when Susan's hurried whisper reached his ear, he came to the rescue with all promptness. Before Lady Orwell knew what he purposed, and before the young heir had realised the possibility of his being routed from the position he had chosen to occupy, a strong arm had lifted him from the ground, a heavy hand was laid upon his mouth, and fierce, determined looks met his, as he was borne out of the room, along the grand corridor, and to the very threshold of his own domains, where he was received with acclamation by the smaller fry. The Countess was inwardly thankful, though outwardly angry and defiant. Susan wished it had been only possible to carry her off also, for it was scarcely to be hoped that her continued presence could be otherwise than hurtful.

But the child gone, she drew a long breath of relief, and, turning to Susan, said, "Now, I hope you are satisfied ; but you don't banish *me* so easily, let me tell you ! A wife's place is by her husband's side."

"Unquestionably," thought Susan ; "but that can be said only of a wife who is a wife indeed !" She knew not what to reply to Lady Orwell ; she would certainly do more harm than good if she remained, and yet who could dare banish the wife from her husband's chamber ! And any word of caution would be sure to be misunderstood, as well as warmly resented. While she sadly pondered, the Countess had advanced to the bedside, and Clarissa trembled at her approach. She came quietly enough, and yet there was a certain rustle of garments which at once made the invalid turn round and fix his eyes upon her. Whether he recognised her or not, Clarissa could not at first determine ; the Countess assumed that he did, and immediately commenced, "How are you, my dear lord ? I am pleased to see you looking so much better than I expected ! so *very* much better ! You have quite a healthy colour, and you are not nearly so weak as was reported to me. Poor little Fordham ! he pleaded so hard to come and see 'poor dear pa' that I could not find it in my heart to shut him out ;

but he is rather too young for a sick-room, and he might not be able to control his feelings; he is such a sensitive child. How do you feel, my dear?"

The Earl still regarded her, but he did not speak.

Her ladyship went on. "I should have come to you before, but I was so ill myself—worse, I really believe, than you are at the present moment! However, I am feeling quite convalescent this morning, and I am going to be your nurse. Clarissa, you had better return to your studies; I will take your place beside my lord."

And she beckoned to Clarissa to rise from the seat which she occupied by the bed. Remembering what her claims were, the girl, however reluctant, would have obeyed her, had not the sick man himself interposed. "Stay where you are, Clarissa," he said, excitedly. "I command you to stay. I will not have this woman at my elbow. What is she doing here? Tell Alexander to show her the door."

"It is Lady Orwell, papa," replied Clarissa, tremblingly.

"What Lady Orwell?" he cried, vehemently, supporting himself on his uninjured arm, while his cheeks burned and his eyes glittered with fever. "Who says she is Lady Orwell? I will not marry her, I tell you! She is the widow Shrosbery—a vulgar, scheming, designing woman. I hate widows, and this one worst of all. Clarissa, tell Hadfield I'll be a bankrupt rather than put that loud-voiced, affected, over-dressed widow-woman in your sainted mother's place! Go away, Mrs. Shrosbery! look out for some other poor ruined fool; I won't have your money bags—the old soap-boiler's hoards—and you shall not be Countess of Orwell!"

"He has gone out of his mind! He is raving mad!" exclaimed the Countess, turning first to Clarissa and then to Susan. "He forgets we were ever married."

"It is delirium," whispered Susan. "Had you not better leave him till he is calmer, till the fever subsides?"

"No!" returned the Countess, angrily. "You are all in a plot against me. You want to keep me from my rights. I shall stay here and do my duty. I think it would be better, though, if you retired, and took that silly child with you; she is shaking all over."

Expostulation was clearly useless; but Clarissa did not move, for her father had clutched her wrist, and held her fast with all the force of delirium. "She shall not stir!" he shouted to his wife, becoming more and more excited, as she foolishly stood her ground, and, as it were, defied his wishes. "Who are you, to come between me and my daughter? Treat Lady Clarissa Oakleigh with the respect due to her rank, I command you! Go away! Go away, I tell you! you make my head ache! How it throbs! Put on another cold bandage, Clarissa; you dipped the last in boiling water. And ring for Alexander to take that woman away. She has no business here."

"My lord! my lord!" pleaded the Countess, half-frightened and half-enraged. "*No business!* Am I not your lawful wife? Who has so much right as I have? Let me change the bandage," and as she spoke she took it from Clarissa's hand.

"Dare to touch me!" cried the Earl, growing furious. "Clarissa! Susan! why don't you ring for Alexander? Ah! here he comes!" as that staid personage, hearing loud voices and his own name spoken, made his appearance, quite as willing to carry off her ladyship as he had been to bear away her son, if only it were at all feasible.

"If she would but faint now!" he said to himself, "or make the least show of fainting, or go into hysterics, I'd make short work of it, and get her on the other side of the door in a twinkling! She'll kill my lord outright if she goes on aggravating of him in this way." What he said aloud was—"My lady, if I may be allowed to speak, perhaps you don't know that people when they are delirious, or any ways off their heads, always hates, and can't abide, the sight of them they loves best in their proper senses! And if they are opposed, it makes them ten times worse, and does a lot of mischief. If I might make so bold, my lady, I should advise your ladyship to go quietly away now, or else keep out of sight behind the curtain till my lord's feverish fancy is over, and he asks for you, which, of course, he'll do the moment the delirium leaves him."

The Countess burst into a flood of tears, and submitted to be led away, observing that everybody was in league against her, and that it was a cruel thing for a wife to be

driven from her husband's dying bed. But she went, nevertheless, and there was silence one more in the darkened room, broken only by the sick man's ravings. His delirium increased every moment, and he talked rapidly about days long past, when the Countess Clarissa reigned at Orwell. Naturally enough, he addressed his daughter as his late wife. "Yes, my dear, I'm come back again!" he said, with a composure that was reassuring after his previous excitement. "Oh, why did I ever leave you, my love? I have been a cruel, neglectful husband to you, my sweet Clara; and you are the meekest and gentlest, the most patient of women! They said you were dying, but they were wrong. Doctors and nurses always predict the worst, don't they. Ah, the croakers! we will have our laugh at them yet. But I am glad I came, dear. Why, now I remember, they said you were *dead*!—*dead*! As if you would die and leave me! I knew it was false—all a mistake. What a strange mistake to make! And as I hurried on my journey, I heard people crying, 'The Countess of Orwell is dead.' And they have put up the hatchment. But you are not dead, are you? Speak to me, darling! Kiss me, and I will never leave you again—*never*! I will be your loving husband always now. Oh, my God, she is alive! and I thought I had come too late!"

Clarissa tenderly kissed her father, and then he seemed content. He settled down again, and said he was tired and sleepy, he would have a nap—"only," urged he, "you must not go away, my Clara; if I awake and find you gone, I shall think I have dreamed; I shall feel as if, after all, you were in your grave out yonder! What lovely eyes you have, my wife! but you have lost your beautiful rose and lily complexion. Was it because you grieved so much, dear? Ah! you shall never grieve again! We are going to be very happy now, Clarissa *mia*—happier even than we were when we first were married."

And with that, still holding his daughter's hand fondly within his own, he closed his eyes, and fell off into a sort of doze, or stupor—his nurses could not determine which. But they longed ardently for Dr. Hammond's return to the Castle, and for the arrival of the London physician.

They had their desire before very long. The Countess, however, waylaid Dr. Hammond as he was on his road to the Earl's chamber, and gave him a rather incoherent account of what had transpired in his absence. One thing he perceived, that there had been some sort of scene at his patient's bedside, and he could have shaken her ladyship for having occasioned it. Arrived in the sick-room, he was shocked and grieved to find how much harm had been done while he was unavoidably detained by another patient. He looked grave and even stern as he watched by the invalid, and listened for the sound of the wheels of Sir Samuel's carriage.

Then he beckoned Susan into the dressing-room, and required from her an exact account of all that had happened; for the Earl, when he left him in the morning, had been going on tolerably well, was certainly not delirious, and seemed likely to pass a tranquil day. Susan repeated what had passed, observing, however, that the invalid had become feverish even before the disturbance occasioned by the Countess and Lord Fordham. Whatever might result, she was not entirely accountable for the serious change which had taken place.

"Perhaps not!" replied the Doctor. "But that little ruffian, Fordham, ought never to have been permitted to enter the room—nay! he ought not to have set foot in the corridor. And when the Countess perceived that her presence excited my lord, she ought to have withdrawn immediately. The scuffle with the boy, and her subsequent persistency, fanned the smouldering spark of fever into a fierce flame, which I am greatly afraid"—and he lowered his tones, lest haply poor Clarissa should hear—"will only be extinguished with life itself. I would give twenty pounds if Sir Samuel were here at this moment."

In less than half-an-hour the great man arrived, having come post-haste from London. He and Dr. Hammond held a private consultation. Then they adjourned to the patient's bedside, making all such examinations as were needful, and afterwards they dined together, and had a further consultation.

"You had better tell them!" said Sir Samuel, at last, to the family friend and doctor. "And you ought to

break it to the poor Countess without loss of time; the noble lord, her husband, has not many hours to live. If he survive to-morrow, I shall be much surprised, though there is just a chance of his lingering on for another day. He has an excellent constitution, and had the blow been anywhere but just in that exact spot, I should still have hopes. But fever and delirium are fatal signs in such a case, as you know well. No! there is nothing to be done. I am very sorry for the Countess and her young family."

"Her ladyship will not long be inconsolable," returned Dr. Hammond, drily; "but Lady Clarissa, her step-daughter, will be greatly afflicted. I do wonder if that poor girl is properly provided for! I shall pity her indeed if she be left to the tender mercies of the Countess."

"Is there ill-blood between the two?"

"Yes, and has been from the very first. Who was originally most to blame, I cannot say; but the Lady Clarissa was a mere child of eight, or thereabouts, and had been shamefully neglected—left entirely to servants after her mother's death. And she was an odd child too—I may say the very oddest child I ever encountered; so quaint and old-fashioned, saying and doing the strangest things that could be imagined. She and her stepmother fell out at the very commencement of their association, and there was a report—more than a report, indeed—that Lady Clarissa set her savage dog on Lady Orwell, and nearly frightened her to death, only a few days before the birth of the heir, Lord Fordham."

"What a horrible child! No wonder the Countess took a dislike to her. Are you pretty sure the story was true?"

"I am so far sure, inasmuch as I was hurriedly called in to attend the Countess, who remained in hysterics for half a day or more. My lord himself informed me that she had had a fright—the great dog Tartar had terrified her, he said. Lady Clarissa's name was not mentioned by him; but all the village heard afterwards how it befell. Still, the Countess is far from a pleasant person to deal with, and I should say she was capable of goading a high-spirited, undisciplined child to desperation."

"How old is the young lady?"

"Let me see! Nearly sixteen she must be; and she has grown up as nice and good a girl as ever lived. The servants, only they dare not show it, half worship her; the tenants and the poor people sing her praises; and I have found her, whenever circumstances threw us together, a most charming and amiable young person. The only fault I have to find with her is her too great gravity; she gives you the idea of six-and-twenty rather than of gay sixteen. But she is invaluable in the sick-room; she has scarcely left her father's side since his accident. In fact, she and Miss Shrosbery, with Alexander, my lord's own man, have done all the nursing."

"And the Countess?"

"Well, the Countess has been suffering from an attack of influenza, and when she felt herself able to visit her noble husband she found him delirious, or nearly so. She appears to be as injudicious a person with invalids as with children; and, therefore, I felt it my duty to request her to absent herself from my lord's chamber at present."

"It was rather a *mésalliance*, was it not—the Earl's marriage with this lady?"

"Very much so. Of course it was a marriage of convenience; my lord wanted money, and she wanted rank and a title. It has not turned out so badly as was expected. I believe the Earl treats her with all outward respect, and she, though uneducated, is naturally a clever woman, albeit an imperious and selfish one; and she has managed to play her part with tolerable good effect. She is much improved since she first came to Orwell as a bride; still—well, the long and the short of it is, no one could accuse her of being a gentlewoman—as you will confess, if she accords you an interview."

"She was a Mrs. Shrosbery, I believe?"

"Exactly, and Mr. Shrosbery was a good, honest, highly-respectable man, who had amassed immense wealth by tanning, or soap-boiling, or candle-making, or something of that sort, on the South side of the Thames. But who Mrs. Shrosbery was, no one knows! She does not appear to have a single blood relation, and she is perfectly silent as regards her early life. Her antecedents were all right, I have no doubt, only *not* aristocratic."

"Was that tall girl in a grey dress Lady Clarissa?"

"No, that was Miss Shrosbery, her ladyship's other step-daughter, who was brought up by her mother's family, and who has an independent fortune of her own. You have not seen Lady Clarissa, I think."

"Is she pretty?"

"Not at all. And yet her mother was a perfect beauty, the loveliest woman I ever looked upon. But Lady Clarissa will be handsomer at thirty than at twenty, and I should not wonder if she were still handsomer at forty. In the meantime, she is not plain, decidedly. I should call her interesting looking, graceful in her movements, with shy yet pleasing manners, and a certain high-bred patrician air, for which, if I am not greatly mistaken, her plebeian stepmother hates her."

"I am interested in Lady Clarissa. I must see her before I leave the Castle."

"You will find her in her father's room when you revisit it. You remain here for the night, I understand?"

"Yes. I am getting too old to drive up and down the country, as I used to do. But I must be off to-morrow morning, soon after daylight comes. I wish I could be of service to my lord, but there is really nothing to be done, and your treatment has been *the* exact thing from the very first. Had I been on the spot, I should have done all that you have done—nothing more, nothing less."

"It will always be my consolation, Sir Samuel, that you so thoroughly endorse my diagnosis."

Two hours later there was another arrival. All aghast and travel-worn, Mr. Hadfield burst upon the scene. He had heard at the lodge that my lord was not expected to survive. Susan's letter had been delayed; and, of course, the post was not swift and sure as it is in these days of steam and electric telegraphs; but he set off, without loss of time, as soon as he received the mournful tidings. He, too, was filled with solicitude on Clarissa's account. Surely, surely the Earl, knowing the disposition of his Countess, and her strong aversion to her step-daughter, had not put off to the eleventh hour such settlement as it was in his power to make. But he felt, nevertheless, that he was hoping against hope.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PASSING AWAY.

"All was done :

The mouth that kissed last, kissed *alone*."

"YOUR letter brought me, you see, Miss Shrosbery," said Mr. Hadfield, when he saw Susan, for whom he at once inquired.

"I intended that it should," she returned, gravely; "though far from apprehending the course things have taken, I felt that on every account your presence here was desirable. And there was no one likely to communicate with you save myself."

"You acted quite wisely. But is the case really so desperate as is reported? At the lodge gates I was positively told that my lord was dying."

"He is not exactly in the article of death, but I fear the end is not far off; it is rather a question of hours than of days, I gather, from what the doctors say."

"One of the saddest things I ever met with! Why, the Earl had a constitution of iron; he is barely fifty, and he might have lived to be ninety! And cut off thus suddenly! Oh, dear! oh, dear! mysterious are the ways of Providence; truly, as the Bible says—'in the midst of life we are in death.'"

"I think it is the Prayer Book that says so; it is true enough, however."

"In the Prayer Book, is it? I fancied it was in Proverbs, or in Job! I could have sworn it was in Job. Never mind! But is it possible to say anything to Lord Orwell?"

"I am afraid not; he is still delirious, though not nearly so violent as he was several hours ago. He knows us all, except Clarissa, whom he takes for her mother. The Countess he recognises, but he persists in addressing her as Mrs. Shrosbery. He seems entirely to have forgotten

his last marriage, nor does he mention Lord Fordham and his sisters and brothers. He appears to me to have gone back to the time of his return from the Continent, after the death of the Countess Clarissa."

"A good thing for him if he have!—the last few years cannot afford many pleasant reminiscences. Miss Shrosbery, take an old man's advice, and never, under any circumstances, be tempted to involve yourself in the matrimonial arrangements of others. I have tried match-making once, and once only, in my long life. Most bitterly do I repent it, and confess my error. Take warning by me, and don't do evil that good may come; if you do, you will be sorry for it, in the end!"

"I quite believe it. I quite feel that half-a-dozen wrongs can never make one right!"

"No more than two and two can make five, argue how you will! Poor Lady Clarissa! When all is over, there will be nothing she can call her own, save a few jewels and her clothes. She will be no better off than the daughter of a petty tradesman, who dies, leaving only liabilities behind him."

"I have money, Mr. Hadfield; I shall be of age in July, and Clarissa shall live with me. We are sisters in all but blood; we shall be very happy together."

"That is very kind of you, but you may marry, and a man does not like to marry his wife's relations, real or assumed."

"I am not likely to marry just yet! I am not engaged; I have not even the shadow of an attachment. So that probability may safely be left out of our calculations for the present, and as to the future, we need not concern ourselves about it. Only, if I live till St. Swithin's-day, Clarissa and I can go at once into housekeeping."

"It is a great consolation to me to hear you say so. Nevertheless, Lady Clarissa is hardly dealt with in having no income of her own. And though I can say honestly that the situation is no fault of mine, I cannot help feeling as though I were to blame in not worrying and pestering my lord till the proposed deed was duly executed. But though you coax or whip and spur a horse into a stream, you cannot make him drink unless he chooses, and a

lawyer is puzzled sometimes to know how best to deal with careless and procrastinating clients, upon whose actions the interests of other persons depend. When can I see the Earl?"

"As soon as you like; Dr. Hammond, I know, will not object to your admittance. And the Countess will scarcely interfere. Indeed, it is just possible that she has not heard of your arrival."

"So much the better; her presence can do no one any good, and may do much harm. Where is Lady Clarissa?"

"At her father's bedside; she has not left her post to-day."

"I should like to speak to the Earl privately. If it is possible to do anything at all, you must get Lady Clarissa out of the room."

"That would be easily managed. But I am afraid it is too late for business of any kind. You would never make Lord Orwell understand what was required of him; nor would the signature of a delirious man be valid, I should say."

"You are right enough there. But, under the circumstances, who would be so base and cruel as to contest it? Her ladyship, as Lord Fordham's guardian, might dispute the will; but even she would scarcely behave with so much malignity, surely! A decent provision for her step-daughter will take nothing appreciable from the rich inheritance of her own children."

"If even a small sum could be secured to Clarissa, it would be such a comfort. She thinks nothing of her own future, poor girl; she is too intent upon her father's state to give any thought to her own affairs."

"The more reason why we should care for her—the more especially as both you and I, and possibly Lady Orwell herself, know perfectly well that my lord contemplated a certain settlement."

"I can bear witness to that; he gave me his confidence on that point most fully. He told me that you had pressed on him, again and again, the absolute necessity of at once completing the arrangements already debated on behalf of Lady Clarissa; and he was most anxious to follow your advice."

"If it is possible to get a signature to the will I have here prepared, I will run the risk of being prosecuted for conspiracy. Such an action would not easily lie at all, and it would speak volumes for the greed and wicked malice of those who brought it."

"I quite agree with you. But we waste precious time; will you not come at once to the sick chamber? If you perceive a chance—the slightest chance—say that you must speak with my lord alone, and Clarissa and I will at once withdraw."

In another minute the lawyer was at the bedside of his dying client. Clarissa sat motionless, holding his hand, and watching, with large melancholy eyes, every change of countenance. She did not speak when Mr. Hadfield approached, but she looked at him with an expression so pathetically sad and hopeless that it went to his heart. He drew near, and gently accosted the invalid:—"My lord, I am concerned to find you in this state. As soon as I heard of your illness I hastened down, feeling sure that you would require my services."

"Is it you, Hadfield?" asked the Earl, quite rationally. And the lawyer began at once to hope that, after all, he had not taken his long journey in vain. The next moment his hopes were dashed, for Lord Orwell said:—"There will be some pretty coursing in a day or two, and we are going out with the dogs to-morrow; but only into the near spinneys. There is a cunning old fox somewhere in the depths of Dagenham Wood, and we have made up our minds to have him this season. We have lost him six times, but the seventh will pay for all. The people hereabouts call the fellow 'Beelzebub'—he has done such havoc in the poultry yards! It is time the hounds got him; will you be in at the death, Hadfield?"

Now, though the Earl spoke as calmly as possible, his words filled Mr. Hadfield with consternation. That very fox, yclept Beelzebub, had paid the forfeit of his crimes at least fourteen years ago! And Mr. Hadfield, though no huntsman, had, as the Earl's guest, followed the hounds at a safe distance, and was, as it befell, through a curious chance, in at the death. The brush had been presented to him—the brush of this very fox, which the Earl pro-

posed to hunt down without more ado ! The trophy had adorned the lawyer's entrance-hall for years, and was there at this moment. It was but too true, the invalid had lost all count of time ; he had gone back to the days of the Countess Clarissa.

"Do not contradict him," whispered Clarissa, who had heard many a time of the famous run, in which the celebrated fox returned almost to his covert, to be torn to pieces just as Mr. Hadfield rode up. Mr. Hadfield's prowess as a huntsman had been a standing joke ever since she could remember. "Please humour him," she added ; "he gets excited if we do not seem to understand him."

"All right," he replied quietly ; "I will be on my guard ; but, meanwhile, I want to say a private word to my lord. Will you and Miss Shrosbery do me the favour to leave us alone for a little while ?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," said Clarissa ; "but I am afraid any reference to business will only worry papa, and be useless, besides ; but if you think——"

"I do think it my duty to mention one or two things to the Earl, Lady Clarissa ; should he appear at all harassed by the conversation, I promise you that I will at once relinquish it."

"Very well—you must know best ; and please let me be summoned the moment I may come back again." And Lady Clarissa, with Susan, left the room, and Mr. Hadfield at once went back to his client's side.

"Would it not be well, my lord," he said, "to conclude that little business we talked about—the settlement in favour of Lady Clarissa, I mean—without any further delay ?"

"What settlement ?" asked the Earl, frowning. "I tell you I have not sixpence in the world to settle upon anybody, and no one knows that better than yourself. Now, don't bother, Hadfield ; let us enjoy ourselves during the visit. And why did you not bring Mrs. Hadfield down with you ? The Countess expected her, I know."

Again the Earl had wandered back to that old visit paid by Mr. Hadfield and his wife in the time of the former Countess—the visit already referred to, when accidentally

he had won poor Reynard's brush. But the lawyer persisted. "No time like the present, my lord. You just sign the deed I have drawn up, and I promise you that all will be right. Your servant Alexander and Dr. Hammond will act as witnesses."

"I will sign nothing that I do not understand; I have signed too often, to my own great injury."

"But this is only what you have proposed yourself—the mere settlement of certain funds at your own disposal on your daughter, Lady Clarissa Oakleigh."

"Clarissa has been a disappointment to me from the hour of her birth. She ought to have been a boy. It would have made all the difference in the world to me. My son would have joined with me in cutting off the entail; but this poor, puny, ill-favoured girl is of no use at all, and the title must go to my uncle Geoffrey, whom I hate like poison. Don't talk about Clarissa. And why have you sent my wife away?"

A dreary sense of defeat stole over Mr. Hadfield as he listened to these wild words; it was even as he feared—the Earl could not be awakened to any sense of present requirements; he was living, or dying, rather, in the past. The Countess Louisa and her unruly brood were nowhere; Lady Clarissa was once more a sickly, fractious, unwelcome babe; and the girl herself, now almost grown into womanhood, was the wife of other days! Nor was this all; the difficulties which had been so insurmountable, before the match with Mrs. Shrosbery was decided upon, were again existent and urgent in the Earl's delirious brain; he was no longer Louisa's wealthy husband, but the ruined and miserably impecunious husband of the lovely, undowered Clarissa Grey! He could not even understand that he had anything to bequeath; and it was evident that to continue to press the matter would, under present circumstances, be as injurious as unavailing.

Mr. Hadfield, therefore, desisted, trusting to the forlorn hope that there might be an interval of consciousness and restored memory before death; but he felt greatly depressed as, sitting silently at the bedside, he watched the man whom he had known from a boy passing thus sadly from a life which had once been of such fair promise—

which had proved so great a failure ! He remembered the young Lord Fordham of forty years ago—the bright, careless, pleasure-loving lad, whose tutor constantly lamented that his noble pupil would not do justice to his own excellent abilities ; he thought of the gay youth, fast approaching man's estate, so negligent of all impending responsibilities, so bent on the gratification of the passing whim ; he recalled the young Earl, making excellent resolutions at the grave of his father, whose honours and duties were now his own ; the fading away of those good and wholesome impressions, and then their sudden but brief revival when sweet Clarissa Grey became his bride. And then the lawyer dwelt on the period most painful of all—the months and years which succeeded the birth of Lady Clarissa ; the fair young wife drooping under neglect and solitude ; the thoughtless husband squandering his goodly patrimony, in spite of every remonstrance ; the mad career in London, at Newmarket, at Homburg, and elsewhere ; the crash ; the utter ruin and disgrace which at last impended !

And then came reflections on the marriage, in which he himself had had so large a share. It was true that the crooked was put straight, that debts were paid, honour saved, and an ancient inheritance rescued from the fangs of unprincipled creditors, chiefly of the Hebrew persuasion ; but, after all, it was a question whether more was not lost than was ever gained. For the Countess had sorely disappointed Mr. Hadfield, and he felt more than ever that she was not the right woman in the right place, but exactly the reverse, and he was the person chiefly to blame in the whole matter.

While he thus mused, the sick man fell asleep, and the lawyer remembered that Lady Clarissa had desired to be recalled as soon as the private interview was over. He went in search of her, and found her and Susan together in the old schoolroom. Susan lingered to hear how he had sped, but his face told her at once that he had been unsuccessful. "It was of no use," he said, when Clarissa had left them, "no use at all ! the last few years of his life seem to be blotted out. A most singular case, but not, I believe, a solitary one."

"No; both Dr. Hammond and Sir Samuel have been called in to similar cases before. There is some injury to the brain; it seems as if a partial darkness had fallen on the memory. It is very strange that the mischief should extend so far and no farther, and yet be irremediable."

"Ought he not to see a clergyman, Miss Shrosbery?"

"I cannot see of what use a clergyman would be, and my lord does not like the rector here; there has been some misunderstanding between them for a long time, I believe."

"But some clergyman ought to pray with him."

"Why a clergyman? Any Christian person's prayers are as acceptable as a clergyman's, and there are several, besides Clarissa and myself, who are earnestly praying for him. Will not you, too, pray for him?"

"I am not much of a hand at praying, Miss Shrosbery. I am not exactly a religious man, I am afraid; though I would not do anything directly against my conscience. I say my prayers in church, of course; in the morning I am too eager to begin the day, and in the evening I am too tired for praying. Besides, my wife does my share and her own too; women, you know, are naturally more devotional than men."

"And yet men have to endure pain and grief, and to die; a man's nearest and dearest cannot go with him beyond the brink of the dark river."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hadfield, slowly shaking his head; "one ought to think of such things, I am aware, especially at my age. I can't expect to be much longer here, though my father did live to be eighty-five, and I very much resemble him; and what is more, I have a fine constitution, and, old as I am, I have never had a serious illness, nor anything like poor health. Still, one *must* die, sooner or later; and of all the friends with whom I started on life's journey, not one remains. Is it Pascal who says we must die alone?"

"Whoever said it, it is only a half-truth, for God is always with the dying, as with the living, and where He is, there need be no solitude or dread."

"But if one has been a great sinner?"

"There is forgiveness with Him; there is a Saviour for

all. Christ came to call the guilty to repentance. Only—only—Mr. Hadfield, don't you think it is a terrible mistake to put off repenting to the last hours of one's life?"

Susan could not trust herself to say more, for Lord Orwell's spiritual state was a deep source of anxiety to herself and to Clarissa. From the moment when he had fallen from his horse, he had been either unconscious or delirious; and had the great question of questions ever been settled? Had he ever thought of going to meet his God? of being called to a reckoning for all the wrong committed in the flesh? of giving an account of his stewardship? The girls could not tell, they could only hope; for he had been so very different, so kind, for the last year; he had even been patient and gentle with his uncongenial, exasperating wife. Surely the change must have had some good source; surely it must have been God's voice, speaking in the soul so long dead in trespasses and sins! They could only hope and pray. And Susan knew that there had been hours when Clarissa's every breath was prayer; and remembering who it was that said, "If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it. *Verily, verily*, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it to you," she was greatly comforted.

It was late before Mr. Hadfield went to bed; tired as he was, he sat over the fire, lost in mournful reflections. It seemed but the other day that he had come down to Orwell, sent by his own father, to the dying father of this man, who was even now come to the end of his earthly career. Only the other day!—and yet many years had glided by since he, in all the glow and strength of early manhood, rode up the great avenue, wondering whether the old Earl—who was not so very old, either—yet breathed. Only the other day! But he had lived his life since then; he had married and brought up children, who had all left him for homes of their own; the bride of his youth, the proud young mother of his firstborn, was a feeble old woman now, with silver hair and bowed form. Yes, he had lived his life—his busy, toiling, prosperous life, and God had blessed him in his store and in his family, and in the partner of his joys and

sorrows! Health, strength, mental vigour, success in his profession—all had been his happy portion. And what had he rendered to the gracious Giver for all these blessings? Little, very little—next to nothing! Ah, worse than nothing! Ingratitude, forgetfulness, abuse of many gifts, was the verdict he felt compelled to pass upon himself; and ere long, death would knock at his door, and he, too, would be gathered to his fathers; his sons would fill his place as he had filled their grandfather's; the world would go on just the same; client would come and go; all would be as it had been for so many years, only *he* would be absent—cold and silent in the grave. And yet, not he—not the creature that thought, and felt, and hoped, and feared—not the spirit that had been breathed by God Himself into that mortal frame, the never-dying spirit; where would *that* be when those eyes that gazed now on the smouldering embers were shut down for ever, when the feet had taken their last step, and the tongue spoken its last words, and the whole corporeal system was mouldering in the tomb?

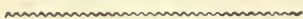
Swiftly came what seemed to be the answer to these solemn queries—"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

"Ah, but," questioned the lawyer once more, "what will my spirit have to say to God, and what will God say to me? Will He not say to me, 'Thou wicked and slothful servant'? Will not the sentence go forth—'Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth'?" And then uprose the prayer, "Let it not be so, oh, my God! Of Thy great mercy forgive the past, and take what remains of my fast waning life, and let me live the residue of my days unto Thee."

Meanwhile, all was silence in the sick-chamber. The dying man slept peacefully; the night deepened, and grew again to early morning; and then came the change. They who watched scarcely perceived it, but they saw that there were reason and memory in the dying eyes, and that the invalid himself was conscious of the awful presence that men call *death*. "Clarissa," he feebly

whispered, "I am going, I hope, where your dear mother is gone. God help you, my child. God forgive me my many sins, for Jesus' sake.. Oh, my God, I commit my soul to Thee!"

And then, before she could realise that the moment of departure had come, he was gone. And Clarissa was an orphan.



CHAPTER XXIX.

A LEGAL INTERVIEW.

"Where shall I find an honest lawyer?"

THERE was a splendid funeral at Orwell. That is to say, there was a vast expenditure of superfine black cloth, waving plumes, heavy crape, and all the trappings of wealthy, ostentatious sorrow. Everybody in the Castle, and most people in the village, were attired in decent sable raiment. Mourning coaches—I could not venture to say how many—followed the slowly-moving hearse, which was drawn by four of the blackest, sleekest horses, with the longest manes and tails, that money and diligence could procure. The housings of these animals were superb—the pall was of the richest Genoa velvet; the coffin also was covered with velvet, and the handles and the plate which declared the name and age of the deceased peer were, of course, of solid silver, to say nothing of the massive coronet and armorial bearings. The bells of Orwell Church, that had rung so merrily at the late Earl's marriages, tolled solemnly now, and rang out their muffled peals; the Castle pews, the churchwardens' pew, the pulpit and reading-desk, and even the communion table, were put into mourning; and once more the hatchments were up, the family vault was opened, and another Earl of Orwell was gathered to his fathers, to mingle his bones with their ancestral dust.

The Countess remained secluded in her own apartments, and saw no one, save the children and her attendants. Even the Rector, who desired to administer religious consolation, was refused admittance. All orders were issued through the new house-steward—a certain personage who had been lately preferred to the office by my lady herself, and the undertaker's men and the servants generally kept solemn cheer and festival. And Lord Fordham was Earl of Orwell, and, child as he was, recognised the increased importance of his position, and gave himself airs that amused all beholders, in spite of the melancholy cause of his infantile arrogance. Clarissa and Susan remained together, and were little seen till after the funeral—nor did the Countess once inquire for them; and if it had not been for old nurse's pertinacity, Clarissa would scarcely have had her black dress ready on the appointed day.

But the sad ceremony once over, Lady Orwell made her appearance, looking very imposing in her sweeping widow's robes, and pronounced herself "equal to necessary business." And Mr. Hadfield was accordingly summoned to a private interview. He found her ladyship quite composed, and sitting in state before an *escritoire*, which contained, as the lawyer well knew, many of her late husband's most important papers. She put her handkerchief—her new cambric, deeply-hemmed, black-bordered handkerchief—to her eyes as he entered, and kept it there, till he began to wonder whether she had sent for him for any other purpose than that of exhibiting her imaginary emotion. Meanwhile, however, he seated himself, and waited till she should be pleased to address him. He felt little inclined to humour her pretences, or listen to the false lamentations which were probably impending.

But for once Mr. Hadfield was deceived in her ladyship. After several minutes of uncomfortable silence, and just as he was about to inquire for what purpose his presence was requested, she withdrew the handkerchief, wiped her tearless eyes, and in the calmest voice commenced: "I have sent for you, Mr. Hadfield, because there are several things that I wish to understand. There is

nothing of any consequence to settle, but there are just a few points to which I wish to make reference before you return to town. In the first place, *there is no will.*”

“There is not! I am sorry to be able to say with the utmost certainty that your ladyship is right. I would have given much had my late lord been able to sign the document which I, at his express desire, prepared.”

“I do not see what my lord had to will away, Mr. Hadfield! My marriage settlements, as you are perfectly aware, made all requisite provision for the future. What my eldest son, the present Earl, does not inherit naturally, and what is not secured to the elder children, is mine, and was always mine exclusively. No one knows better than yourself that the late Lord Orwell was a beggar when I married him, that he had considerably less than nothing when I agreed to wed him, redeem his encumbered estates, and free him from all difficulties. It was *my* money that paid off the mortgages, that satisfied the money-lenders, who had gathered about him like sharks in the wake of a drifting vessel; *my* money that freed him from bonds and liabilities; *my* money that once more placed his various establishments on a proper footing; *my* money that he spent so lavishly on pleasures in which I had not and could not possibly have any share! My lord had, therefore, absolutely nothing to bequeath; and he had more sense than to make a will which must perforce be nothing better than mere waste paper! Of course, we need not say so much to all the world; but *we* know of how much worth any last will and testament of the late Earl of Orwell would have been! There is no such useless document, however; so we need not concern ourselves about what might have been.”

“Pardon me, Lady Orwell; but I must concern myself about what might have been—about what would certainly have come to pass had not this lamentable accident cut short his lordship’s life. You ought to know your late husband’s intentions, which he freely expressed to others as well as to myself. My lord, by dint of personal economy, had raised a few thousands—only a few!—a mere *bagatelle* to a wealthy woman like your ladyship, which he was most anxious to invest for the benefit of Lady Clarissa.”

"What has Lady Clarissa to do with my money?" replied the Countess, sharply. "The money, whether it be much or little, came out of the fortune which I brought him, and he had no power to will it away."

"Yes, he had! Do you not see that the revenues of his ancestral estates were his own, and inalienable, as they are now your son's? I grant that you enabled him to redeem them from the various sequestrations which made him a titled pauper; but, being redeemed, no matter how or by whom, they became his own again, and he had full right to dispose of them as he pleased. That is to say, if anything remained which neither Lord Fordham nor his brothers and sisters could legally claim, it was the Earl's, to hoard or speculate with, or bequeath, exactly as he chose. And the sum of eight or nine thousand pounds—I am not certain which—is at this moment lying in the late Earl's name at his banker's, and they know perfectly for what purpose the money was allowed to accumulate."

"What was the late Earl's is now the present Earl's. I shall take every care of my son's interests."

"I doubt it not. But surely one owes something to the dead! It seems to me that my lord's earnest wishes on this head should be sacred, and as implicitly obeyed as though they had been duly signified by legal instrument, which your ladyship would have been *compelled* to respect—*nolens-volens*."

"I don't know what '*nolens-volens*' means! Some fine French phrase, I suppose! But this I know, Mr. Hadfield: had any such 'legal instrument' been produced by you, or any other person, I should have disputed its valuation; no! I mean its—its——"

"Its *validity* your ladyship probably means? but you would have disputed in vain. You would never have received a verdict had you carried your cause into every court of law, from the lowest to the highest; nor when once thrown, with heavy costs, would you have been permitted to make any further appeal. A man's will, duly signed and properly witnessed, is not to be upset by senseless litigation which has not a foot to stand upon."

"And yet wills have been upset, and will be upset, as long as there are legal deeds and lawyers in the world."

"Granted. But not such a will as my Lord Orwell's would have been. You would not have had an inch of ground to go upon. This is idle talk, however, as, unfortunately, there is no will in the case; only his lordship's *expressed desire*."

"What is it you wish me to do?"

"Make the same provision for Lady Clarissa as would have been made ere this had her father not been thrown in the hunting-field."

"How can I? I know enough of law—the law of inheritance—to perceive that the spare thousands which you say are lying at the bank in my late lord's name, belong legally to the present Earl, who is a minor, and can therefore do nothing in the matter."

Mr. Hadfield could scarcely keep back a smile at this exhibition of shrewdness. "Ah! what a clever woman!" he thought; "if only she would use her talents in the right direction!" What he said was, "I congratulate your ladyship on your legal knowledge. It is quite true that we cannot appropriate those exact funds I named for the purpose for which they were designed. They are, as you say, the young Earl's, and must remain in trust for him, with other properties which descend to him by law of primogeniture. But there is nothing to prevent your ladyship carrying out your husband's cherished desire. You are richly dowered, even when your children's claims are fully met; and I ask you, therefore, in the name of the dead man, who was the father of your children—who gave you his rank and title—the man whom you once professed to regard with some degree of affection—to do what is simply right and just, and make such provision for Lady Clarissa Oakleigh as shall render her independent and——"

But here the Countess abruptly interposed.

"Stay! that will do! You are wasting breath, Mr. Hadfield, and you do not seem to have much of it to spare! Under no pretence can I be called upon to provide for my step-daughter Clarissa, who has always behaved herself with the utmost ingratitude, and during the last

few months has done her best to deprive me of my husband's regard and confidence. I will do nothing—*nothing*, for that girl!"

"Think well, Lady Orwell, before you pledge yourself to an unworthy course of conduct! If your own sense of right, if your womanly heart cannot prevail, if your conscience says nothing, if your respect for the dead has no power over you—still I conjure you, for your own sake, not to act in such a way as will ensure you the contempt and avoidance of all good people. Let it be once known that you condemn Lady Clarissa to poverty—utter poverty—and the world will cry shame upon you! And of the world's dictum I am sure you stand in awe."

"Not in this case. Once for all, Mr. Hadfield, understand that my mind is made up, and that neither threats, entreaties, nor arguments can avail to change it. I will not make the smallest settlement on Lady Clarissa, whom I do not like, whom I can barely tolerate; but because she is—*who she is*—my late lord's lawful daughter, I will give her a home while I live; I will clothe her decently; and what is more, I may, if she behave herself properly and do my bidding—I don't promise, mind!—but I *may*, if I find her at all deserving, leave her a few hundreds in my will. Or, should she marry to my satisfaction—which is very unlikely—I *might* interpose to prevent her going *quite* empty-handed into another family. But all depends on her own behaviour. She must treat me as she has never treated me yet, if she means to find any favour at my hands. I won't even harbour her under my roof—under my son's roof, I ought to say—if she don't treat me with all possible respect and deference, and obey me as if she were my hired servant."

"Perhaps you intend to make her your servant without any hire?" said Mr. Hadfield, thoroughly offended. "Lady Orwell, I deeply deplore the mistake I made when I induced the late Earl to place you in the position of stepmother to his daughter. I am deeply sorry for Lady Clarissa, the more so that I cannot yet see how I am to serve her."

"You will serve her best if you advise her to be humble and submissive to the only person in the world who will

do anything for her. We will drop the subject, if you please; indeed, I feel so annoyed, and my nerves are so weak from my recent bereavement, that I cannot even discuss those points which remain to be settled between us."

"All that it is my duty to do, Lady Orwell, I will do, as I have always done, for the family. I leave the Castle to-day——"

"Indeed! you will do nothing of the sort," she interrupted. "There are a great many things I want you to explain, and you must go over some of these papers with me, and tell me what I am to do."

"I must leave the Castle to-day," he resumed, as if she had not spoken; "I shall at once proceed to take those steps which, as your late husband's man of business, I am bound to take. I will also take care that every legal form is duly observed. I will act as your ladyship's adviser till your son's affairs and your own are in completest order; and *then* I shall at once surrender the charge of them to whomsoever your ladyship may be pleased to appoint."

"Do you mean that you refuse to be what you always have been to the reigning Earl of Orwell?—'Legal friend, and man of business,' my lord used to call you."

"Legal *friend* I can never be to you or yours, Lady Orwell; therefore, I will not be your man of business. I will do the duty which yet remains to me, and do it conscientiously to the very best of my ability. That being done, I wash my hands of your affairs, and hand over to any solicitor whom you may prefer all the Orwell deeds, documents, memoranda, &c., &c., which are now in my possession."

"I never knew anyone behave so abominably," replied the Countess, who was both angry and nonplussed. She felt that she could not afford to quarrel with Mr. Hadfield; no one else knew her affairs so thoroughly—how thoroughly she did not like to remember. It might be all very well to have a lawyer whom she could instruct as she liked, and browbeat at pleasure. She had not the smallest regard for Mr. Hadfield, though he had faithfully served her interests, and had been the confidential lawyer

of both her husbands; but she had all the wisdom which is common to sharp wits and narrow souls, and she shrank from the risk of actually offending him; for retaliation was within his grasp, and, judging him by herself, she scarcely doubted but that he would speedily avenge his wrongs. So she tried to soothe him; but in vain. He had long wished to relinquish his position in this family, and his sons, into whose hands his practice had by this time pretty well fallen, were like-minded with himself. He was, therefore, not to be moved by the widow's apologies and blandishments; he would wind-up the late Earl's affairs, he again asseverated, and place all things in perfect order, and then the Countess must be so good as to accept his resignation.

"But you are Susan's lawyer," observed her ladyship. "Do you throw her over?"

"By no means. While I live, I hope to manage Miss Shrosbery's affairs. After my death, perhaps before, for my health is fast failing, my sons will undertake them. They are, either of them, old enough to be Miss Shrosbery's father, and will be pleased to act for her, under any circumstances."

"And you will not act for me?"

"I cannot! And your ladyship knows why."

Then she burst out into unreasonable anger, and threatened that it should be all the worse for Clarissa, in consequence of what had passed that morning.

"You are not Lady Clarissa's *guardian*, you must understand," he coolly replied. "Unless she choose, you cannot control her."

"Nonsense!" she answered. "A girl like that, not sixteen till next month, *must* have a guardian, and the law would naturally declare me to be the fittest and only person."

"As there is no will, no guardian has been appointed. Indeed, a penniless young person needs rather a generous friend and protector than a legal guardian. At the present moment, Lady Clarissa is her own mistress."

"I shall take steps! The law will give me—her father's widow—the necessary authority, I am sure. I shall appeal."

"To whom, may I ask?"

"To the Lord Chancellor, of course."

Mr. Hadfield laughed. "Your ladyship is far too clever a person to expose yourself to certain failure and ridicule. I think you will not trouble the Lord Chancellor, nor provoke the sort of comment which would infallibly result. And now I really must say 'good morning.'"

"One word! I am, past doubt, the guardian of Susan Shrosbery?"

"You are, until—*July!* It is scarcely worth while asserting any right for so short a period as four months! As soon as Miss Shrosbery is of age she will have her own establishment, unless I am very much mistaken."

"A girl of one-and-twenty cannot live by herself."

"Respectable chaperones are easily to be procured."

"She will never leave Clarissa; the two have sworn eternal friendship."

"Lady Clarissa can accompany her friend. Such an arrangement would be most suitable. Of course, some elderly lady must reside with them, and I think I know one who would be delighted to undertake the situation."

"I shall certainly not permit it."

"You can only hinder it by locking up your step-daughter, and if you do that the law will interfere, and compel you to release your prisoner."

"I do not choose it to be said that Lady Clarissa Oakleigh is under any other guardianship than my own! And if the girl has any pride—any *proper* pride—in her, she will scarcely consent to be dependent on a person who is not even remotely connected with her. Then Susan will marry—if she do not die. She inherits her mother's delicacy without a doubt, and she has looked very poorly all through the winter. By the way, what becomes of her fortune after her death?"

"She can dispose of it as she pleases, as soon as she attains her majority. Should she unfortunately die before the 15th of July next, the Shrosbery money reverts to the Shrosbery family—to some distant cousins, whom I only know by repute. The fortune which came to her from her own mother goes, I believe, in case of her dying childless, to that good-for-nothing fellow at Buttermeads."

"The Shrosbery money ought to revert to me. I cannot think why my poor dear Peter did not so order it."

"Mr. Shrosbery probably thought he had behaved handsomely enough when he left you, *unconditionally*, all his wealth, save only that twenty thousand pounds which he devised to his daughter. But some people are never satisfied. And now I will take leave of your ladyship, and prepare for my journey home. I shall have to trouble you once or twice, I am afraid, before your affairs can be in a fit state to be formally transferred; and, in the meantime, perhaps you will take counsel of your friends, and select someone who will undertake the charge which has been mine so many years."

"Since you are so ill-natured as to throw me over in this miserable emergency, just as I am for the second time deprived of a husband's care and guidance, perhaps you will recommend a suitable person. I *must* have a lawyer, a family lawyer, I suppose?"

"I think you must. Both as Dowager-Countess and the young Earl's guardian, you will continually require legal action and advice. But I must decline the responsibility of naming, or even suggesting, any person whatever. Your ladyship must confer with your own friends; they will doubtless be happy to give you the benefit of their counsel. Or, if you know enough of the profession, make your own unbiassed choice; that, I think, would be the most satisfactory way of proceeding."

"You are a good-for-nothing, spiteful old man, Mr. Hadfield, adding to my heavy affliction as you do! And to think that I should live to be called a *dowager*!"

"You are as unfortunate as Lydia Languish, who wept at being called 'a spinster.' I dare say you will soon find a legal gentleman entirely to your mind. I promise one thing, however: if you should select an unreliable, unworthy person—for there are scamps, and very specious scamps too, in our profession, as in every other—I will give you a word of warning."

"And you ought also to promise that you will hold sacred all confidences with which you have been favoured from the very commencement of our acquaintance."

"For what do you take me, Lady Orwell? Such a

promise is entirely needless. I have no more right to divulge your secrets when I cease to be your lawyer than I have had ever since I knew you and them. However, if it be any comfort to you, understand most distinctly that I shall still keep that silence which I have preserved so long, unless, indeed, you *compel* me to speak! Your late husband knew nothing of your family connections; I introduced you to him as Mrs. Shrosbery, and I assured him that you came of a respectable, though humble, stock. More he did not inquire; more I did not communicate. Is it likely that I shall now divulge what I then concealed? Be happy, so far as I am concerned; Miss Sparks, of Whitechapel, is dead and buried, and her memory has perished with her. My first relations were with Mrs. Peter Shrosbery, with whose antecedents I never had any concern, though for certain reasons I was fully informed of them. And just one more 'last word!' You have a strange house-steward who takes a great deal upon himself, and altogether comports himself in a singular and most ungentlemanly manner. Take care how you trust that man, or he will work you some grievous harm! I suppose you know who he really is? He *looks* to me something between a ruined adventurer and a returned convict—a compound of both, perhaps. Good morning."

Lady Orwell sank back on her chair pale and faint. The unexpected warning touched her all too closely, for the new house-steward was no other than her redoubtable cousin, Mr. Jack Sparks, who had insisted on being elected to the post he now filled in the Orwell household. On no other terms would he consent to keep her ladyship's counsel, and he at last succeeded in persuading "cousin Loo" that his residence in the family would be immensely to her interest, as he was fully resolved it should be to his own.

CHAPTER XXX.

SUSAN AND CLARISSA.

"That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off Divine event,
To which the whole creation moves."

Yes! Jack Sparks, or, as he was now called, Mr. Thompson, was really a person of authority in the household of the widowed Countess! How it had all come about needs not to be recorded; only Jack, being undoubtedly a person of genius, and having everything to gain and nothing to lose, and being moreover remarkable for persistency of character, had so worked his schemes, that Louisa succumbed, after a brief and ineffectual struggle, to the inevitable, and accepted the proposed alternative.

"Can't you see," said Jack, "that the arrangement is good for all of us? I'll take care of *your* interests"—this, it must be remembered, was in the Earl's lifetime—"I'll see that *you* are first; I'll take excellent care that whoever goes to the wall, *you* don't! And I shall keep my eyes wide open, and I won't have you cheated."

"Except by yourself!" remarked the Countess, quietly.

"Except by myself, as you say," resumed Cousin Jack in the coolest manner; "of course, I shall take all possible care of number one, Loo, my dear! It's our duty as Christians, you know, to do the best we can for ourselves; therefore, you may be sure I shall make hay while the sun shines, and feather my nest while I've the opportunity. But if I am number one, you are number two; and if I am very much the better, you'll be none the worse, but just contrariwise; and so it's settled."

And so it was! The Countess would have resisted had she dared, but a good deal had happened of late which seemed to demonstrate that Cousin Jack might be more useful to her as a friend and ally than as an enemy. So, a sort of conspiracy was hatched between the two, and

Jack Sparks was presented to the Earl as a *gentleman* of respectable family, who had been unfortunate, and was anxious to gain an honest livelihood as genteelly as possible; and somehow he managed to produce excellent testimonials, and to convince Lord Orwell that he would be, in the capacity of house-steward, exactly the right man in the right place.

"And, of course, I'm always 'Mr. Thompson,' and you are always my lady-Countess," said Jack, when the treaty was concluded. "And you never need be afraid I shall forget myself, so long as you keep faith; and I'll do my best for you and yours—I swear I will!—and I've got sharp eyes, and quick ears, and no wool in my brains, and they will be clever folk that gets over me, or hoodwinks me in any way."

Susan Shrosbery distrusted this man greatly; as for Clarissa, she had the worst opinion of him; and we have seen in what light he was regarded by that experienced and astute veteran, Mr. Hadfield. Lady Orwell, when she recovered from the shock of that gentleman's unexpected warning on the subject of the new house-steward, took counsel with herself, and came to the conclusion that perhaps, after all, it was a good thing—"a real Providence"—that he retired from his ancient post as family solicitor; he knew too much; he was too keen an observer; he spoke his mind with a candour amounting to insolence, and she could never feel quite free and unrestrained when she transacted business with him, or under his instructions. And as she had perfect confidence in his honour, and was quite sure that he would still preserve that secrecy on certain points which was so essential to her own success in life and peace of mind, she arrived at last at the certainty that all was just as it should be; that it was the best thing in the world that Mr. Hadfield voluntarily withdrew, and that it was also the second best thing that Jack Sparks, or, as we must call him now, Mr. Thompson, was formally inducted as house-steward before the Earl's decease. For it had been contrived somehow that with my lord, and not with my lady, should rest the entire responsibility of engaging this new and confidential servant.

When Mr. Hadfield left the Countess, he went straight-way in search of the young ladies. He found Clarissa, but not Susan; Miss Shrosbery was lying down, feeling by no means well.

"Lady Clarissa," said the lawyer, "I am returning to town this afternoon, and I have—if you will kindly listen to me—a few words to say which relate to your own private interests."

"I shall listen with gratitude," said Clarissa, in her sad, quiet voice; "I know well that you are my friend; and I am sure my dear father placed the most perfect confidence in your truth and judgment. On several accounts I need your advice."

"And you shall have the best it is in my power to give you, Lady Clarissa. First, may I ask what are your plans?"

"I have none," she replied, her colour rising, and her voice trembling as she spoke. "Is there no will, no paper of any kind, that has reference to my future? Am I entirely dependent on the Countess's bounty?"

"I am afraid I must say that for the present it is so. I have just come from Lady Orwell, and she refuses—in short, I cannot bring her to see that it is at all her duty or her privilege to abide by the Earl's unwritten, but verbally expressed, intentions. It is best to be plain. As far as the Countess is concerned, you are without the merest trifle of an income."

"My own mother had nothing, I think I have heard you say?"

"Nothing in the way of gold or silver; her only dower was her goodness and her beauty, which I have never seen equalled. Your father, however, fully intended making a small settlement upon you. Had the arrangements been fully completed, you would have had from three to four hundred pounds a year secured to you for life."

"And as those arrangements remained uncompleted—can never, indeed, be completed—I have no income at all?"

"None whatever! You have your mother's jewels?"

"Yes; my father gave them to me some months ago. As hers, they are most precious; but actually, I am

afraid, they are not worth much—the setting is old-fashioned, and the gems themselves are of no great value. But, such as they are, I believe they are my own.”

“They are yours, and yours only, without the shadow of a doubt. As far as I know, Lady Orwell is not even aware of their existence, and you had better not inform her, for she might—I do not say she would—but she *might*, if cantankerously minded, dispute even so paltry an inheritance. She is not, I am sorry to perceive, favourably disposed towards your ladyship.”

“She never was; but that is partly my own fault, Mr. Hadfield. From the beginning she misunderstood me; she forced upon me a discipline which I could not endure, for I was a strange, wayward child, utterly untrained, naturally proud and independent, and till she came, I had always contrived to hold my own, and, to a great extent, follow my own inclinations. That I needed discipline I am quite sure; but, somehow, we were perpetually at issues, and what seems to me now very strange, our antagonism was always that of two grown persons, rather than of a woman and a child. I must confess to a good deal of very bad behaviour, but not without provocation. And then, I quickly learned to estimate her ladyship’s character in its due proportions; her follies and her vulgarities were all patent to my observation, and I was so unwise as to let her know it. Again, when dear papa and I became friends, she was displeased; she was jealous of every attention, of every little kindness he bestowed upon me. She declared that I made a breach between them, but that was not true; they were, to a certain extent, estranged long before papa and I came to understand each other, and I can say with a clear conscience that I never tried, even remotely, to foster their unhappy differences. Indeed, I kept many things from papa—things which would have amazed him—because I would not provoke his displeasure against his wife, and also because I knew that such revelations as I might have made to him would have vexed and pained him in no small degree. And I am most thankful now that on many occasions when I was tempted to complain I held my peace. Still, Mr. Hadfield, I wish you to comprehend

that the Countess is not wholly to blame; for if, in the beginning of our intercourse, she wished me well, and felt for me any kind of affection, I did my best to repel and alienate it. I wish I had known Susan earlier!"

"I wish with all my heart you had, and that on several accounts. But I doubt if even her influence would have mended matters between Lady Orwell and yourself."

"I think it would, because Susan has taught me what I never guessed at before—the truth and happiness of real Christianity. Do you know, Mr. Hadfield, till she came, I was little more than a baptized heathen?"

"Not quite so bad as that, I am sure. Madame Pierrot would certainly not neglect your religious education, and I know you attended to what are called 'religious duties.'"

"My Christianity was not worthy of the name; I read the Bible as a task—as a 'religious duty,' perhaps; I went to church, of course, and as I grew past childhood, I tried to follow the prayers and listen to the sermon—the more especially as Madame used to require a slight *résumé* of the morning's discourse; and I learnt my Catechism, in which, however, I never believed, for I *knew* in my heart that I was not 'a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.' Then I was confirmed, *because it was proper*, and I had to study the Thirty-nine Articles, and to read-up on the subject of General Councils. In fact, I became quite a theologian. But my religion was a mere skeleton of dry bones; my faith was blind credulity; I knew no more than a babe what a blessed thing it was to feel that God was my Father and my Friend—to lay all my cares and troubles at His feet, and for Christ's dear sake to strive and live a Christ-like life."

"And you know it, *now*?"

"Yes; I know it truly. God sent Susan to teach me; to awake me out of my deep sleep of sin and stupid security. Whatever trouble is in store for me, nothing can ever take away the blessed peace and joy which I have found."

"I suppose you were—what is called *converted*, then?"

"I suppose so. And yet if I were, conversion is a very

different thing from what it is commonly represented to be."

"Can you tell me at all what sort of experience it is?"

"I am not sure that I can. I went through no sort of process or crisis, such as I read about in good books. I only know that up to last August my soul was asleep, and now it is awake; that the eyes of my mind were closed, now they are open—and *I see!* Christ was a mere historical personage, now He is a living power in my heart—my Lord and Master, whom I love, and whom it is my happiness to serve! I can hardly tell when this new life actually commenced; it grew upon me till I *felt* that I lived."

"Ministers of religion teach us that we must be born again; the Bible says so, too. What you describe must surely be this new and second birth! Lady Clarissa, do you think a man could be born again, and not know it?"

"I think any man or woman who was really born again could not fail to know it. I think—indeed, I feel sure—a person may be ignorant that he is *not* born again! He may be misled by the Church Catechism—one part of which, I do think, Satan must have invented, to cheat souls into a false peace and rest; that part, I mean, which makes baptism our salvation! But to be indeed 'born again,' and not know it!—I think that cannot be; not for any length of time, however. A child soon finds out that it is alive; a corpse or a statue can never make such a discovery. But I believe I know what you mean."

"I am not quite sure what I mean myself, Lady Clarissa; but it is time I knew whether I am dead or alive; whether, if my mortal part died to-night—and I am an old man, and I have had many warnings of late—whether it would be all right with me."

"I felt one day just like that—I was not sure about myself; I thought, 'Suppose I have deceived myself! suppose I heard no voice! suppose it was all a fancy—a delusion!' And for a little while I felt most miserable."

"Only for a little while?"

"Only for a very little while. Susan said, 'If you were not changed, you would not care. Which way is your face turned?' And then I knew that my face was

turned Godwards, that I had turned right round, so to speak, and that I would not for worlds look the other way again. I was like a person in a straight high road, who must needs go forward or backward,—and there was no question in my heart as to which it should be; for my soul went out to God—the living God. And I felt that in God only could I live, and move, and do the work I had to do. I knew then—I know it more surely now—that I have a great deal to learn, a great deal to conquer in myself, a great deal to attain to; but I was, and I am, quite sure, that *my face is turned to the Lord my God.*”

“And your back is turned upon the world?”

“I would not say that! It sounds fine; but I don’t believe in it. After all, it is God’s world, and it is full of beauty, and goodness, and sweetness. I do so dislike to read lives of pious people, who are always reviling the world. All the while they mean the sin that is in the world! Why can’t they say so?”

“But is there not a text which says, ‘Love not the world’? Are we not told ‘the whole world lieth in wickedness,’ or something of that sort?”

“And so the whole world, with here and there solitary exceptions, *did* lie in wickedness, when the apostle wrote that. The world of St. Paul and St. Peter was the Roman world—which must have been little better than hell.”

“And since that day the world is better, you would say?”

“Better a thousand times! If it were not, then Christ would have lived and died in vain. And He who said, ‘I, if I be lifted up, will draw *all men* unto Me,’ would be a mere boaster and impostor.”

“And yet all the world has not come to Christ?”

“No; the world is slow to know its best Friend, to find out its greatest joy! But as Christ said it, it must be true. And He must reign till He has put all His enemies under His feet. No, Mr. Hadfield, I will not say I have turned my back on the world—how can I when there is so much to be done in it for God?—when the world is so full of our brothers and sisters who need help and sympathy, and all that we can give—for Christ’s

dear sake? But I hope I have turned my back on sin, inasmuch as I love it no longer—and, above all, turned my back on *self*, which too often makes one's world. Self was my world once, I know."

"I should like to talk to you longer on these subjects, Lady Clarissa; perhaps, when next I see you, I may be able to say truly that my face also is turned in the right direction. But my time here is short, and business must not be neglected. You have not formed any plans, you say?"

"None precisely for the present. But Susan will be of age in July, and then she thinks we may live together in a quiet way. I am not sure that I should like to be dependent, even upon her, and I see no disgrace in honest work; still, she will give me a home for awhile—for my whole life if I wish it! I think I see dimly what I can do—I have a project."

"Am I impertinent when I ask what that may be?"

"I will tell you right willingly, only at present it must be entirely between ourselves. I think I may make something of my painting. Dear papa used to say that if ever there were a Revolution, such as they had in France, which compelled the nobility to earn a living, I might certainly keep myself from want. And my master in London said more than once, 'It is a thousand pities you are Lady Clarissa Oakleigh; you might be a great artist if you were a poor, struggling woman, compelled to use your fingers in order to gain your daily bread.' At any rate, I think I shall try."

"And I feel sure you will succeed, though I do not like the notion of Lord Orwell's daughter toiling for this same daily bread which is so essential. However, I commend your spirit; earned bread is always sweeter, ay, and wholesomer, than the bread of dependence. But, however you may eventually settle it with Miss Shrosbery, who, I feel sure, will gladly share her income with you, do not hesitate to accept her offer of a home at once."

"I shall not; Susan and I quite understand each other. But I want to know, can Lady Orwell keep me till I am twenty-one? I mean, can she insist upon my remaining under her protection?"

"She cannot. As things are, you are quite free of Lady Orwell. She has no right over you, save that right which is accorded to every lady of the house over her own family, and that right, such as it is, ceases the moment you quit the shelter of her roof, under which she cannot force you to remain. You are, I regret to say, all but penniless, but you are your own mistress. At the same time, I would advise you not to quarrel with my lady more than you can help, and to do everything quietly, leisurely, and moderately. She cannot really injure you, I think, but she can make you extremely uncomfortable, not only while you are here, but when you and Miss Shrosbery leave together. By the way, I wished very much to speak to Miss Shrosbery; I hope she is not seriously indisposed."

"I hardly know what to say, for though she makes light of her ailments, I am secretly uneasy on her account. Dr. Hammond told me she suffers from indigestion, and that the food she takes does not properly nourish her. Her mother died early of decline, you know!"

"Yes, I remember her mother well, but I should not say Miss Shrosbery was consumptive; and yet she seems a good deal out of health for so young a person. And Dr. Hammond calls it indigestion, does he?"

"I am not sure that he does not suspect something more. I do not think indigestion makes people faint."

"Does Miss Shrosbery faint?"

"Yes, every now and then. And she is so easily tired; I can do three times as much as she can, and not be fatigued. But all that has happened lately has exhausted her strength; and then there was her aunt's death, which, as you know, was a great grief to her, and the breaking up of her happy home. Her coming here was the best thing that could have been, for me, but it was the greatest trouble she ever had. And though she did not give way and fret—because she always carried with her a talisman that kept her quietly happy and contented—still the wrench was a severe one, and I do not think she has ever been quite well since she came to us."

"What sort of fainting is it?"

"A very deathly sort! She is not merely faint, but

she goes 'right off,' as old nurse says. I asked her what it felt like, this 'going right off,' and she replied that it was so sudden she could not tell, only all in a moment her heart seemed to stop beating. We never leave her alone now, except when she is lying down, and even then I manage to look in about every half hour without disturbing her."

"Miss Shrosbery must see a London physician. I ought to have known of this before. Here she comes. Don't say a word about what you have just told me."

Susan came in with her usual cheerful countenance, but looking, nevertheless, pallid, worn, and languid. There was something curious about her complexion, Mr. Hadfield thought, and he remembered noticing it before, but it had been driven from his mind by reason of his anxiety for the Earl while he yet lingered, and by the grief which almost overwhelmed him when all was over. He simply said he was sorry to hear she was so poorly, and that he thought she ought to have other advice. Dr. Hammond was an excellent man, and clever, but still a mere country practitioner, with comparatively limited experience. Then the two talked business for a little while, and then Mr. Hadfield lunched alone, and afterwards the carriage came round which was to convey him the first stage on his journey. He turned into the schoolroom, as it was still called, to say farewell to the young ladies, and found Susan there alone; Clarissa had just been summoned to the presence of the Countess.

As they were parting, Susan said, "Suppose I do not live till my birthday?"

"Suppose nothing of the sort!" he replied, with an affectation of lightness he did not feel. "We must get you away from Orwell as soon as possible; in the meantime, give my lady-countess a tolerably wide berth; have as little to say to her as may be, and don't let her whims and oddities trouble you. It is not worth while, when it is for so short a time; and I will undertake that when you go Lady Clarissa goes with you."

"But if I *do not* live till St. Swithin's Day—and you know life is uncertain in every case; have we not just had a sad proof of it?—it would make so much difference to

Clarissa. Could I do nothing beforehand? It is for her sake I ask."

"Nothing whatever! Pray don't worry yourself, Miss Shrosbery. There shall be no procrastination in this case, I promise you! I will obey your instructions, and the will shall be in readiness for you to sign the moment the clock has struck twelve on the fifteenth of July."

"But I have some money which I have saved out of my annual allowance—you know where it is; could not that be, in case of the worst, secured to Clarissa?"

"It might be managed, I dare say. I will think about it. Good-bye."

When just out of the village the lawyer met Dr. Hammond driving home to dinner. They stopped to exchange *adieux*, and then Mr. Hadfield said, "By the way, Doctor, I am concerned about Susan Shrosbery; what is the meaning of these fainting fits?"

"They mean heart disease, and, I am afraid, of a very bad type."

"Is there any—any immediate danger?"

"Without a closer examination I should not like to say; but my own opinion is, her life cannot be a long one, though by taking care and avoiding hurry and excitement she may live for many years. A sudden shock would almost certainly prove fatal."

Mr. Hadfield was so moved that he could not reply, and Dr. Hammond drove on. The lawyer went on his way with a saddened heart, filled with the worst apprehensions.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE YOUNG EARL.

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." "A foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." "It is good for a man that he should bear the yoke in his youth."

"ORWELL," said the Countess to her son, a few days after Mr. Hadfield's departure, "go and tell Clarissa I want her."

The boy-earl was so busily engaged in spinning his top that it is to be presumed he did not hear his mother's command, for he went on with his play just as if she had not spoken.

"Do you hear me?" continued her ladyship, sharply. "When I speak I am to be attended to!"

Lord Orwell stopped playing, for his top had run down and rolled away among the curtain-folds. He was a vulgar-looking boy, with small, dark eyes, a coarse mouth, and a general expression of cunning. He was not in the least like the Countess, who had undoubtedly been in her time a fine, handsome woman of a certain type. Her son resembled neither of his parents, but he was the living image of his grandfather Sparks, who had never been remarkable for anything except a curious self-complacency and a strong appreciation of his own virtues, which no one save himself could ever be persuaded to acknowledge. Also, as might have been expected, he was an out-and-out plebeian, which in his case did not much matter, since in a great nation there must be pawns as well as kings and queens, and the pawns, numerically speaking, must be always in the ascendancy. But in the case of his grandson it did matter, and his mother, in her most secret thoughts, sometimes feared that he would never be the pride and ornament of the British peerage, as she had once hoped and believed he would be. She shuddered as she gazed upon his large flaps of ears, on his broad,

unshapely hands, on his coarse, lank hair, and on his freckles; which might all, you know, have been redeemed from actual ugliness or vulgarity by an ingenuous, amiable countenance, and a kindly, generous nature, shining out through homely features and unwholesome complexion—only they were *not*. And at this moment the lad, as he looked up defiantly, and even contemptuously, at the parent who, in spite of her many faults, loved *him* dearly, with all a mother's passion of devotion, seemed absolutely repulsive.

"Ring the bell, and send a servant," he replied; "noblemen don't run on errands; I'm *the Earl* now, and I'm master of you all—Chatters says so!" Mr. Chatters being a showy, weak-brained young man, engaged as the young Earl's attendant and companion, and also as part instructor. He was, in short, the masculine equivalent to a nursery-governess, and though he called himself "my lord's tutor," he was besides my lord's valet, playfellow, slave, and abject flatterer.

"I'll thank Chatters to hold his foolish tongue," returned the Countess. "If he can't talk more sense than that to you, I'll send him off pretty quickly, with a flea in his ear!"

"No, you won't!" was young hopeful's answer. "He is *my* servant, not yours. I'm Earl of Orwell now pa's dead; and the Castle is mine, and the house in London, and all the estates are mine, and I know what's what! There, now!" And my lord, having recovered his top, began spinning it again, as if to make up for wasted time.

"Oh! you wicked, naughty, bad, ungrateful boy!" exclaimed the unhappy Countess. "How dare you speak to your poor widowed mother like that? Don't you know, sir, what the Bible says will happen to those sinful children that disobey and despise their mothers? Why! the ravens will pick out their eyes, and the young eagles shall eat them! Think of that!"

"There are no eagles in this country," replied Lord Orwell, decisively, "nor ravens either, except those two tame ones that Bobby Binns has got. And if the ravens did get eyes or anything else to eat, they'd never be such

fools as to let the eagles get it ! And there are no eagles except in the Zoo—pa told me so !”

“You dreadful little infidel ! Something will happen to you if you go on like that. If there are no eagles and ravens there are plenty of *hawks* ! and they will do quite as well.”

“No, they won’t ! Hawks steal chickens, but they don’t touch boys ; they are afraid of them. Why, I’d shoot them if they came pecking at *me* ! I’ve fired a gun twice.”

“You haven’t ; you never have !” cried the mother, sorely disturbed. “Oh, Orwell, my darling, tell me you only said so to frighten me !”

“Fact, ma ! And, what’s more, I shall do it again and again. Don’t all gentlemen shoot ? Didn’t papa go out with his gun and the keepers ever so often ? But women don’t understand ! They are all *muffs* ! Chatters says so.”

“Chatters deserves to be hanged. I shall have a few words with him, and let him know what I think of his improving conversation.”

“Oh, very well ! I don’t suppose he’ll mind. Old women must mag, he says, and hard words don’t hurt anybody. But *I* won’t be magged at ! I’m Earl of Orwell, and I’m going to keep ferrets.”

The poor Countess was quite overcome. If the boy was like this *now*, what would he be at eighteen or twenty ? Blinded as she was concerning her “lambs,” she had quite sense enough to perceive ere long, and that before the child became a youth, there would be a fierce struggle for the mastery. Nor could she fail to remark that she was beginning to reap a harvest of her own sowing. Her husband had often said to her, “You are ruining that child ! Of all the pampered, selfish, greedy, saucy boys in the world, Fordham is the worst ! And instead of curbing his evil propensities, you encourage him in them by indulging him in all his whims, even those which are most injurious, by praising him to his face, and never permitting any inferior person to reprove him, let his offence be what it may, and so fostering his natural selfishness, insolence, and vulgar arrogance. I must take him in hand myself, I see !”

And take him in hand he did, on several most memorable occasions, producing an astonishing hubbub in the family circle—the son and heir screaming and kicking, the Countess shrieking in hysterics! And that was pretty nearly all the result effected; the Earl had very little idea of what parental correction ought to be, his one remedy for all outbreaks being “a good sound thrashing!” And if that did not avail, he could not imagine what else would. And, indeed, his son was one of those miserable creatures whom it seems impossible to guide or govern by love. Here and there a boy does exist to whom an occasional flogging is a positive benefit—one who is not to be swayed by affection; who is, or appears to be, insensible to kindness, and who mistakes gentleness for cowardice, and patience for weakness. Such an one certainly requires strong measures, or else he becomes intolerable, the dread of the whole household, and the terror of his younger brothers and sisters, to whom his example must necessarily be most hurtful.

The half-dozen chastisements which the youthful Earl had received had certainly not improved his behaviour. Still, his father had been some check upon him, and he was afraid in his lifetime to give himself full fling to play the nursery-tyrant, to kick the servants, and to use language which he had learned—no one could guess how! He was neither afraid of, nor subject to, his mother. In spite of her passionate regard for him, in spite of the many indulgences he received, in spite of every favour, he did not love her in the least. His was essentially a low nature, and he had that instinctive contempt for his mother's sex which seems peculiar to a certain low and degraded type of character. It had been the Countess's express provision, whenever new attendants were required in the nursery department—and that was pretty often, as you may well suppose—her *sine quâ non*, so to speak, that her eldest son should never be chidden, reproved, scolded, contradicted, or found fault with by anyone but herself. And as, in her too partial eyes, he never did anything really worthy of blame, and as she implicitly believed his bare word against any collected amount of testimony, it came to pass that he was *never* reprimanded, or corrected,

or set right, even when plainly in the wrong. A fine-natured, good-hearted boy must have suffered under such treatment—at the best he would have become a self-centred, self-conceited autocrat; but this boy became, as was inevitable, simply intolerable, and the prey of flatterers and toadies of both sexes almost from his cradle. His father's death was a greater misfortune to him, poor boy! than it was to his desolate, unprovided-for sister, Clarissa.

Lady Orwell was really so much affected that she withdrew to the solitude of her own chamber, there to take counsel with herself on the important subject of her son's education. As usual, her cogitations ended in a mere shadowy resolve to exercise a sterner discipline by-and-by. After all, she told herself, he was but a boy of high spirit; he had nothing of the milksop about him; his inclinations must not be unduly repressed or thwarted—which really meant that he must have his own way in everything; and when he was a little older he would know better, and perceive that his behaviour required to be amended. And so the foolish woman laid the flattering unction to her soul, thus providing for her declining years an endless source of misery, and shame, and tardy, vain repentance.

She felt, however, too weary, "too much upset," to converse, as she had intended, with Clarissa; so the girl had a respite, of which she was utterly unconscious. But on the third day after this scene she took courage, and decided that the interview should immediately take place. It was quite time, she thought, that she and Clarissa came to an understanding, and the sooner that young lady comprehended her situation, or, as the Countess put it, "*knew her place*," the better for both parties. And she must have a little private conversation also with Chatters, and caution him against putting naughty, rebellious notions into the young Earl's head. Altogether she felt quite valiant that morning, and was no sooner dressed than she despatched Mdlle. Coralie for Clarissa.

The Frenchwoman found the young ladies comfortably seated in their own sitting-room, Miss Shrosbery reading aloud, and Lady Clarissa busy on a painting, which was nothing less than a portrait of Susan herself. "Madame la Comtesse command your attendance in her own chamber,

miladi Clarissa," said the waiting-woman; "and I would say to you, that you should not keep her one instant waiting." There was an insolence in her tone that brought the hot colour into Clarissa's face; but she answered quietly, "I will be with her ladyship immediately, Coralie. I must finish laying on this colour."

When Coralie was gone, the girls looked at each other, and Clarissa said nervously, "Now comes the struggle! Susan, I wish I knew how far I *ought* to submit myself to my stepmother."

"That depends so much on what she requires," replied Susan. "I think, if I were you, I would give way as far as possible, seeing it is but for a very short time. She will not send you among the scullery-maids, I suppose."

"I should hope not; but that she has some great humiliation in store for me I cannot doubt. Well, one might do worse things than wash dishes. Scullery work is honest, at least. Still, I fancy she will not relegate me to the back-kitchen—it would be too much talked about. But what I want chiefly to know is, what I shall say about our future plans."

"Say nothing, unless you are distinctly asked; and if questioned, give short, respectful answers, and make no explanations. It is useless to rouse her hostility on that point. If she insists upon a general confession of purpose, refer her to me."

"Very well. I must not linger, or I shall find her affronted at the outset. Now, Susan, pray that I may keep my temper, and be able to reply prudently! I am not afraid of her, I think; but I am a little afraid of myself, lest the old pride and resentful aversion get the mastery again."

"I shall not forget you, my dear. Come back to me as soon as it is over."

"You speak as though I were going to have a few teeth extracted! Well, I am quite sure that at this moment I should prefer the dentist to the Countess." And then Lady Clarissa put aside her canvas to dry, and prepared to obey the unwelcome summons. When she entered her stepmother's room, it was barely five minutes from the moment when Coralie had delivered her message; never-

theless, her greeting was:—"Next time I send for you, Clarissa, I will thank you not to delay. Please to understand that I exact, and that I will have, prompt obedience from all my dependents." Clarissa was silent.

"Why don't you speak? Sullenness is insolence, remember."

"I am not sullen, Lady Orwell. I did not think you required an answer. I will come more quickly next time."

"So far so good," thought the Countess. "She knows she must keep to her cake and milk now! She has plenty of sense, though she is such a proud, aggravating little vixen." And at that moment her ladyship hated Clarissa most cordially. In spite of the childish awkwardness, and the peculiarity of looks on which the Countess had so often dilated to her lord, the girl was growing up, or, rather, had grown up, a veritable patrician. There was an unmistakable grace about her slight, insignificant figure, and a refinement in that sallow, sharp-featured face which was not to be found in the countenance of any one of her own unruly, ill-bred children. She saw the superiority, and detested her accordingly. She did not ask her step-daughter to sit down, but kept her standing, as if she were giving orders to a domestic.

"Now, then, Clarissa," she began, "let you and me understand each other! I suppose you know your poor pa has died, and left you not a penny in the world? And your own ma, you know, came to Orwell as empty-handed as a beggar-woman! She was only a governess, I'm told! So, of course, you have nothing—*absolutely nothing!* Now, how do you propose to live?"

"It was not poor papa's fault—he did mean to leave me just a little fortune of my own. The very deed was drawn up according to his instructions, and it only wanted signing."

The Countess burst out laughing, as if Clarissa had said something extremely droll. "*Only* wanted signing!" she repeated. "You are quite amusing, my dear, with your *onlies!* Well, you see that small want of a signature just made all the difference. Though, by the way, I should have disputed any such document—signed or not; for my

lord had no right to will away to you, or to anyone, the money that I brought him. However, he did not do it, so it does not matter."

Clarissa had her own opinion on the subject of her father's *rights*, but she had the discretion to refrain her lips; it could do no good now to argue the point, and it might—nay! probably would—do harm.

Lady Orwell resumed:—"Well! you don't answer my plain question—*How do you propose to maintain yourself?*"

"If your ladyship will give me a little time to think about it, I may be able to answer your question satisfactorily. At present, I do not quite see my way to earning a livelihood, though I think——"

"You think what? Go on, and be explicit. As I said, you and me have got to understand each other."

"I think, if it were necessary, I could teach. I learned a great deal with Madame, and more, perhaps, since I have studied alone with Susan. It is quite true that my mother was a governess: I should not be lowered by following her example."

"Well, Clarissa, I think you *could* teach! It would be a monstrous shame if you could not, after all the money that has been spent upon your education. Why, Madame Pierrot, what with her salary, her keep, her expenses paid here and there and everywhere, and the presents my prodigal lord thought fit to give her, never cost me less than £200 per annum. I should think you *could* teach, indeed!"

"I will try at once, if your ladyship wishes."

"So you shall! You shall begin to-morrow."

"*To-morrow?* Do you, then, know of anyone who at once requires a governess?"

"Yes, I do! I want one myself, and your pupils will be your younger brothers and sisters."

Clarissa started in dismay. The scullery, she thought, would be a far happier sphere of duty than the nursery. "I am afraid I should never keep them in order," she replied, gravely; "they are very difficult to manage."

"They are no worse than other children, only nobody has any tact with them. If you cannot *manage* children and keep them in order, you are not fit to be a governess.

Of course, you'll be what they call a nursery-governess—you are quite too young and inexperienced for anything else. Besides, you cannot suppose that I should permit you to go out into a situation! What would the world say of me, I wonder? No! no! I keep you under my own wing. I am quite ready to give you a home for any length of time. Your proper place is undoubtedly where I am, and your proper guardian is your father's widow. But you cannot expect me to keep you, and clothe you, and pay your doctor's bills, and provide you with pocket-money—all *for nothing*! If you have any spirit, or any proper pride in you, you will not wish for it, you will not even submit to it. Besides, it is very bad for young people to be idle, and have no settled duties. It will do you good in every way to have regular work. So you will move to the nurseries to-morrow. You will live there entirely, you understand; for children need incessant care and supervision. You will also superintend the nurses, for they want looking after. I am persuaded those sweet lambs are often shamefully ill-treated by those plausible women. In short, you will be responsible for everything."

A charming prospect, truly! Clarissa thought she would rather be made responsible for a herd of wild cattle on the moors. "I must consider," was all she said; and as Lady Orwell nodded a dismissal, she returned to the schoolroom, to discuss the matter with Susan Shrosbery.

CHAPTER XXXII.

COMING TO AN UNDERSTANDING.

"And so that castle vanished in thin air,
And all the joy they looked for might not be."

"My dear, it is not to be thought of!" said Susan, that same evening, when she and Clarissa had quietly talked over the Countess's new arrangements. "In the first

place, you would do no good in that nursery; and in the next, that nursery would be to you, in every sense of the term, injurious! Nothing would be gained by your yielding to Lady Orwell's proposition."

"Except that I should feel I had done my duty—or, at least, tried to do it."

"Your duty does not call you in that direction. If the Countess were a poor, overworked woman, or if the children were to be influenced by you, I should be the last to deter you. As matters are, I am sure you ought not to undertake so hopeless and painful a task. Did you make any promise?"

"None! I objected, of course, and was scarcely listened to. I said I would think about it—I think I said I would consult you, but I am not certain. Perhaps I only thought it, for I did not want to compromise you in any way."

"You need not have feared, Clarissa, for I intend to compromise myself. I am not afraid of her ladyship; and I mean to speak faithfully to her."

"That means you are going to be very disagreeable."

"I dare say it does! People who speak faithfully are horrible nuisances, I know; but there are cases in which one cannot help being a nuisance. I will not be uncharitable if I can help it; but, for once, I will speak the truth to one who has little chance of hearing it from anybody else. I will not have you sacrificed; I promised your father that I would stand your friend."

"Dear Susan, you are the best friend a poor girl ever had! What do I not owe to you?"

"Where there is real affection, there cannot be obligation. What you owe me, however—if you will put it that way—pay me back in love and in confidence, and leave your affairs for the present entirely in my hands."

"Only do not talk too much to Lady Orwell and make yourself ill again. You know excitement generally ends in faintness."

"I shall be as calm as the Mere out yonder when not a breath of air is stirring. All that she may say concerning myself cannot hurt me; her taunts will not make me angry, and her savagery, if she show any—well! it will

glide off my mind like water off a duck's back ; or, to use a prettier simile, like the crystal drops we saw this morning gliding down those crinkled, bloomy cabbage-leaves. Do not be afraid for me."

"Shall you tell her what we have agreed upon ?"

"That depends. I did not intend to do so, and Mr. Hadfield thought that, in her present frame of mind, it would be wiser to go on quietly till the time arrived for action. It is absolutely useless to *talk* to some people. But circumstances alter cases ; and I am sure Mr. Hadfield would be the last person to wish me to keep silence when speech became imperative. This arrangement of hers shall not be carried out if I can help it, Clarissa ; you shall *not* go into the nursery."

"She cannot exactly *force* me there," said Clarissa musingly ; "the question is whether I *ought* to refuse ? After all, she only bids me not to eat the bread of idleness. Shall you see her to-night ?"

"No time like the present. I will go at once, and unannounced, or she may decline seeing me."

In accordance with this resolution, Susan sought the Countess in her boudoir, where she had spent a great part of the day—dining alone with the little Earl and the Honourable Augustus, both of whom fed like young cubs, and fought vigorously over a piece of raspberry turnover, the elder brother asserting his rights as lord and master of the Castle, the younger asserting his by sheer brute force, as being possessed of superior muscular *un-Christianity*. Neither of them heeded his mother's remonstrances and reproofs, and when the fray was over she congratulated herself that table-cloth, plates, dishes, &c., had not been swept to the ground in the shameful contest.

When Susan knocked at the door she imagined it was Coralie, whom she had despatched on some errand to the housekeeper's room, and she at once replied, "Come in."

She looked surprised at Susan's appearance, and greeted her with an abrupt "Oh ! it's *you*, is it ?"

"I hope you are feeling better to-night, Lady Orwell," returned Miss Shrosbery, seating herself on a low rocking-chair, and drawing up to the fire, evidently prepared for conversation.

"I am feeling very *low*—very low, indeed, Susan," replied the Countess, with an orthodox application of the broad-hemmed cambric. "Some people go through life without so much as a vexation—they don't even lose a pet spaniel; while others have no end of trouble. Here am I, in widow's-weeds for the second time, and I am only forty-five! Even if my duty to my sweet lambs did not forbid it, I would not marry again; a third bereavement would be the death of me."

Susan felt that to such a mourner she had really no consolation to offer. The Countess seemed tolerably comfortable under her "bereavement," although she never looked well in deep mourning, and she was quite aware of it. It gave her, in spite of all its richness and style, a common appearance—the air of a respectable, well-dressed Mrs. Gamp. She had been nearly all day packing away her jewels, which would not see the daylight again for an indefinite period. She sighed pathetically over an emerald *parure*—her last purchase in Bond Street; and she nearly shed tears over a pearl and ruby necklace that all her female friends secretly envied—or so she dreamed, for she had a most barbaric love for gold and precious stones.

"You look dreadfully pale, Susan," began the Countess presently, while her visitor was hesitating as to her opening speech, relative to the business on which she came. "But I suppose it's that horrid black! I wish one might mourn in crimson or purple; no one looks their best in black."

"I dare say not," replied Susan, looking down at her crape-covered skirts; "and I do believe it is a very foolish and troublesome custom. It does not matter to us, who have a goodly share of this world's pelf; but I am sure it must be sadly inconvenient, not to say burdensome, to those who are badly off. We order our mourning, regardless of expense, and it comes; they must scheme and bargain, and perhaps go in debt, in order to put on the regulation costume. If I were a great lady—a princess, for instance—I would try to change, or at least to modify, the fashion in that respect."

"Ah! one must conform to the custom of our class.

It does not matter about poor people so much—they can afford to please themselves in such things; but *we* of the aristocracy must consider what is due to society, and personal inclination ought always to give way to duty.”

Susan, remembering how she had been scolded into grey and lavender a few weeks after the death of her who had been as a mother to her, could scarcely forbear smiling. The Countess, however, was too intent upon the embroidered coronet and cypher on her handkerchief to notice it; and she continued:—“It must be, as you say, a terrible tax on people who are left with little or nothing to pay drapers and undertakers’ bills with. I could not say what *all* the mourning for the household will come to. A pretty penny, certainly. Such hosts of servants—and Clarissa; and of course, I could not do less than let *her* have bombazine, and crape up to her knees.”

“Oh!” said Susan eagerly, “that reminds me. I intend, if you do not object, to pay for Clarissa’s mourning myself. Indeed, as I have no sister, and as I shall be my own mistress so soon, I wish to be held responsible for *all* her expenses.”

Her ladyship’s countenance changed. “You are very generous, no doubt,” she replied sharply, “but I cannot permit it; it is not to be thought of.”

“Why not?” asked Susan quietly, but emphatically. Now nothing put the Countess out sooner than being asked to render a reason for any statement she advanced. It was one of her late husband’s sins against her, that he occasionally wanted to know *why*! It was a misdemeanour, too, which she invariably resented.

“I don’t know that I am obliged to answer that question,” she returned, putting on her most *affronted* air. “I suppose I am old enough and experienced enough to do as I choose, and speak as I choose, without being called to account for it. Young people nowadays have so much presumption, and think they must know better than those who knew the world before they were born.”

“Indeed, I beg your pardon,” said Susan, gently; “I had no thought of calling you to account; I only wished to know why I could not spend some of my income on Clarissa as well as on myself. Mr. Hadfield says I have

complete control over my property after the fifteenth of July next, only the principal of that which I inherit from my own mother must go back to the Marriotts, should I die unmarried, or, being married, without children. But the twenty thousand pounds my father left me I may bequeath to anyone I like."

"I feel sure your father never meant *that*! That money ought to come to me, or to my sweet babes, in case of your death without issue, which I think is likely enough; you don't look to me as if you would ever make old bones. As to Mr. Hadfield, he is an ill-tempered, cantankerous, spiteful old man. I forgive him his insolence and bad treatment of myself on account of his years. But I have given him his dismissal! I have taken *my* affairs, and the Earl's, entirely out of his hands—and if you have any prudence you will do the same, for I am sure he is in his dotage, and not fit for important business; and I think nothing of those sons of his, who may be honest, but most likely are not! All lawyers are rogues!"

"Nay! that is too much to say of any class, I think. Surely there are good as well as bad in all professions and in all conditions of life? I have no doubt that Mr. Hadfield's sons are as honourable as their father, whose character is, as we all know, above suspicion. And they must have plenty of experience; though called young, they are grey-headed men, and enjoy a high reputation in the legal world."

"That is neither here nor there! I said they *might* be honest! And perhaps they are! I am sure I hope they are for their own sakes, for we all know that 'honesty is the best policy,' and roguery is sure to beggar itself in the end. But I am sick and tired of the very name of Hadfield, which has been thrust at me ever since I married your poor, dear, blessed father, Susan. One may keep one's servants till they become one's masters and mistresses; and one may also stick to one's lawyer till he talks more like your enemy than your friend, and dares to take you to task when your plans are not exactly in accordance with his own. Mr. Hadfield forgets himself, and he forgets who I am; I am well quit of him."

"I am sorry you misunderstand him—though, of course, you must act as seems best to yourself. But it is of Clarissa I wish to speak at present. It is so sad that Lord Orwell did not live to sign that settlement."

"Not at all sad! He had no right to leave *my* money to another woman's child. Mr. Hadfield says it was *not* my money; that by virtue of my marriage-settlement it was his to do with as he liked. But it was no such thing."

"I will not argue the point; the proposed settlement might have been legal or illegal, I cannot tell. Though I must say I have all confidence in Mr. Hadfield's opinion. He is too cautious a man to risk his own credit as a lawyer, or to get his client into trouble; and too experienced to make a mistake in matters so important. The fact, however, remains the same; Clarissa has absolutely nothing of her own."

"Who is to blame for that? Why didn't her mother demand some settlement on her marriage? Some people have no more caution than a baby. If something had been settled on that poor but weak-minded lady, it would be, past dispute, her daughter's *now*! Some folks think when the sun shines that it's never going to rain any more. I am a woman of business."

"And in that character, I wish to speak to you of certain arrangements, which I hope will be carried out, between Clarissa and myself."

"Clarissa is not of an age to make arrangements; girls of sixteen can scarcely be expected to have much judgment. You can please yourself if you like. Being so close upon your outcome, it's no use putting obstacles in your way, I know." The Countess spoke as if Susan were an apprentice, and just out of her time. Probably no Countess of Orwell had ever before referred to an heiress's majority as her "*outcome*!"

"First of all," continued Susan, "you will allow Clarissa's bills to be sent in to me?"

"I don't mind paying them—for once! Of course, in future, she mustn't expect to employ Madame Mathilde, who is my own dressmaker. And if she makes herself useful—and she may be very useful to me, if she chooses—of

course she'll have a *right* to her board and lodging; and I'll take care she is dressed as becomes her position."

"But will her position be that of Lady Clarissa Oakleigh, the late Earl's daughter—or that of nursery-governess in your ladyship's service?"

"She need not call herself 'nursery-governess,' but it will be very good for her to be employed. You know, as well as I do, that one of the poets said—

" 'Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do!'"

"Clarissa is never idle. She is the most industrious person I ever met with. *Her* hands are never idle, her thoughts are never fixed on vacancy. She is so busy, that she often makes me feel ashamed of myself—though I believe a good deal of my laziness really is indisposition!"

"We can't all be made of leather and cast-iron, like Clarissa. What a mercy it must be to have no nerves, no sensitiveness, *never* to feel tired!"

"It must, indeed!" And Susan could not prevent a slight inflection of satire as she spoke. "Still, granting that her health is excellent, and her spirits good, it is no less her merit that she is continuously industrious. But, to come to the point, will it not be a sad waste of time and energies to devote hers to nursery services, which may just as well, and better, be performed by other and more competent persons?"

"A waste of time to take charge of my sweet, fatherless babes? Can any occupation be more honourable than that of training the young to paths of virtue and renown? Can anything be sweeter than to devote one's self to the welfare of helpless, innocent childhood?"

"I wonder your ladyship does not undertake the pleasing task yourself. Who can be so fitted as a mother to be the guide and ruler of her little ones?"

"If my health would permit, my responsible duties would not. And I do not care to trust my lambs to mere hirelings. Clarissa may be busy with her books, and her painting, and her Dorcas work, but nothing comes of it. That sort of occupation *don't* pay. And if your dear

father, Susan, hadn't studied the main chance, and stuck to what *did pay*, you would be out in the world, getting your own living at this moment, and I!—well, I don't suppose I should be Countess of Orwell, widow of one, and mother of another, peer of the realm! What's the good of sewing your fingers to the bone for people who can't give you more than a 'thank you'? Or wearing out your eyes reading small print, and drawing roses and daisies, and sleek cows feeding in a meadow?"

Susan did not attempt to argue the question; she knew it would be useless, and she also perceived that Lady Orwell would talk discursively on any subject rather than the one to which she wished to lead her. It was necessary to be firm, and to come to the point without delay. So she said gravely, with the air of one who will not be trifled with, and yet quite respectfully—"Let us understand each other, if you please, Lady Orwell. Pray forgive me, if I speak too bluntly, but a little plainness of speech is sometimes worth a good deal. Do you *really* purpose sending Lady Clarissa Oakleigh into your nursery to wash, and dress, and keep in order those unruly children, with whom you cannot cope yourself?"

"I really do, Miss Shrosbery, since you *must* know. And when I purpose anything, it is generally done. Pray, what are your objections? Though it does not much matter what they are, since I am Clarissa's lawful guardian."

"There, I think, your ladyship deceives yourself. At any rate, it would cost you much trouble and expense to prove her your ward. A stepmother is not necessarily the guardian of her stepchildren. If Clarissa were an heiress, with ever so small a fortune, she would be a ward in Chancery. Listen, Lady Orwell: Mr. Hadfield has it in charge for me to secure some pretty little villa, a few miles out of town—somewhere in Surrey, I should like it to be. It shall be simply but elegantly furnished—my income will not suffice for anything like extravagant expenditure; and I shall keep two respectable women servants, and a boy who can make himself useful in the house and garden, and groom the pony I mean to keep for driving about the lanes."

"Quite a pretty little picture of rural life! And, of course, you'll make clothes for the poor, and teach in the school, and play the Lady Bountiful according to your means? Very well! I wish you success with all my heart! I don't think it is quite decent for so young a person to go to housekeeping, for the world is censorious, you know, and it will talk; but that will not hinder you from carrying out your schemes, I suppose. *My* word has no great weight with you, I am well aware. And what has all this to do with Clarissa?"

"Everything, because my home will be her home. And it will be quite ready for us on St. Swithin's Day."

"It may be ready; but Clarissa will by no means be ready. I cannot answer to my conscience if I let my late dear lord's daughter outrage the commonest proprieties. If she were an obscure person, it would not matter so much; but fancy what society will say, when it finds out that Lady Clarissa Oakleigh is living without proper protection! For a girl of twenty-one needs protection herself, Susan, whatever you may think of it! But I suppose people brought up to farming-life, as you were, don't know much about the rules of the *élite*."

Lady Orwell pronounced it *alleet*. Susan replied, "I do not profess to belong to this world's *élite*, certainly; but your ladyship, I hope, may trust me not to disgrace my father's name or my mother's memory. I trust I shall do nothing and allow nothing to be done under my roof of which a cultured, high-principled Christian person could disapprove. However, as I believe it to be my duty both to God and to man to abstain from all appearance of evil, I have determined on securing the companionship of some elderly lady of education and good social position; I have already heard of an officer's widow—she is fifty years of age—who will be glad to add something to a very limited income. I think she will be an excellent and irreproachable *chaperone*, and I shall endeavour, and so will Clarissa, to treat her kindly, and even affectionately. So on the score of the proprieties, your ladyship may be quite contented."

"I am glad to hear it on your own account; it will make all the difference in the world when you come to

settle in life. But as for Clarissa, it matters not at all, *chaperone* or no *chaperone*, I cannot and will not allow her to quit my protection till she is of age. What will the world think of *me* if my lord's eldest daughter goes to find a shelter in the home of a person who is not even distantly related to her? It will be sure to declare that she was *driven* away; I know how people talk."

"And what will people say, if you detain her against her will, and give her menial work to do, when she might live comfortably as a lady, under proper protection? Will they not say you keep her to serve your own ends?"

"Upon my word, Susan Shrosbery, for a mild-spoken, meek-faced young woman—and I'm sure a stranger would think butter wouldn't melt in your mouth!—you're uncommonly cheeky."

"Does that mean impertinent?"

"It means worse! It means downright impudent and shameless! I've been told it's a vulgar word, but it is *expressive*, at any rate."

"Extremely so! I am sorry such is your opinion of me, but I cannot help it, and you must know, if you will only give the subject grave and calm consideration, that I speak the simple truth."

"I hate the simple truth; it is always so unpleasant. But don't expect that you'll take Clarissa away with you when you go, for I shall never—no, *never*—permit it."

"Very well; then I have no more to say."

"But you'll *act*? I see it in your face. Ah! I was always famous for reading countenances; long ago I was complimented on being a second *Lavinia*!" She meant *Lavater*.

"You ask me what I will *do* in case you forbid Clarissa to join me in my proposed housekeeping?"

"There is no '*in case*,' because I have already forbidden anything of the sort, and shall keep to my text. But tell me, if you please, Miss Shrosbery, in what way you contemplate setting me at defiance, and encouraging that girl in her self-willed, rebellious opposition to those who have the care of her?"

"You must excuse my answering you at present, Lady Orwell; I must reflect a little before I decide on my

mode of action. One thing I am resolved on—if you send Clarissa into the nursery, *I go too!*”

“But I don’t want *you* to go, Miss Shrosbery.”

“I promised Lord Orwell never to desert Clarissa, and I never will. I quite understand you, then; the nurse-maid or nursery-governess scheme is to be carried out, and the plan of our living together quietly in some country place you refuse to sanction?”

“To both questions—*yes*, Miss Shrosbery. And I think I am more than considerate in giving you any answer at all. Very few people in my position would put up with such a catechising. However, this much I’ll concede—I won’t insist on Clarissa’s duties being commenced to-morrow; I’ll give her to this day week to make up her mind to it—and not an hour longer, remember. And whatever you and she may think, I shall keep a tight hand over her till she is one-and-twenty. Some girls want keeping under, and she’s one of them. Humble pie is good, wholesome food for such as her, and the more she quarrels with it the more she’ll have. And, further still, Susan Shrosbery, if you give your dear Clarissa such advice as leads her to open disobedience, the worse it will be for *her*, that’s all! And now you know all about it, and the sooner you and the officer’s widow are settled in your villa, the better I shall be pleased! I wish to be alone.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SUMMER-HOUSE.

“Why doth this sweet maid lie
Pale and still, under the sky?
She will not speak nor lift her hand—
This fairest lady of the land.
Cold and mute she droops her head!
Is the gentle maiden dead?
Alack! alack!”

THE Countess, however, was very much dismayed, when, in touching upon the vexed question of Clarissa’s future,

in conversation with several of her own friends, she found that the public verdict was not altogether in her favour. She had certainly no lawful authority over her step-daughter—though, as all agreed, it was quite in the fitness of things that she should continue to reside with Lady Orwell while unmarried. A few, however, of the Countess's intimates shrugged their shoulders, and told each other, in strict confidence, that though Lady Clarissa might be an exceedingly troublesome and unpleasant young person, she was heartily to be pitied if delivered over to the tender mercies of her stepmother, whose aversion was but too manifest.

For reasons which she did not choose to explain, Lady Orwell did not insist on Clarissa's services in the nursery at the stipulated time; she told her rather abruptly that for the present she might please herself, only, as she now professed to be so very good and religious, it would be worse than inconsistent if she studied nothing but her own ease and her own slothful inclinations. And for awhile, events progressed more calmly than the girls had ventured to expect. Clarissa and Susan remained together for the most part unmolested, the former working industriously at her painting; Susan's likeness was finished, and pronounced "excellent!" The Countess, though she criticised it very freely, could not but admit that the artist had caught the exact expression of her sitter, and one morning she considerably astonished Clarissa by requesting her to paint her brother—the young Earl. Of course Clarissa could do no less than assent, but she felt anything rather than pleasure in the prospect of the task she must undertake.

"Now, be sure and do him justice," was the Countess's emphatic adjuration, when the young gentleman, duly posed, was ready for his first sitting. And Clarissa glanced with dismay at the coarse features and low cunning of the countenance she was expected to transfer to canvas.

"What does justice mean?" she said to Susan, when she had completed, with much success, the rough charcoal outline. "Am I to be faithful, or am I to flatter? The poor child will look hideous if I do not idealise a little—

and yet, it is shameful to make one's pencil and brush untruthful. What *shall* I do, Susan? I foresee that this portrait will get me into trouble."

"I think I should make a *faithful* likeness, if I were you," replied Susan. "You owe it to yourself, and to your art. At the same time, you might try to give him the very best expression of which he is capable. There are moments when his mood is not quite so bad as at others; let us tell him that he must really be very good all the time his likeness is being taken, and then he will *look* good; but that if he gives way to his naughty passions, he will look as he feels, and generations to come will know that he was of an evil disposition."

"I am afraid he has not sufficient regard for the opinion of the present generation to make him care for the verdict of the future. And his moral obtuseness is so great, that I am pretty sure he has no notion of what 'being very good' really is."

"Nevertheless, we can try."

And try they did! but not at all successfully. At first, allured by the novelty of the thing, and duly impressed with his own immense importance, my lord submitted to be posed, and obeyed orders, or rather yielded to requests, with the best air imaginable. But as time passed on, he grew weary of the restraint, and could only be brought to sit by dint of bribes, entreaties, and promises. Occasionally, he behaved so perversely, that his attendance was useless, for, in spite of every effort, Clarissa found that she must wash out nearly as often as she put on a colour. She became quite as tired of her work as was her troublesome subject, and but for the Countess it would have been speedily abandoned. And there was another thing, too, that annoyed the artist exceedingly. Mr. Chatters always accompanied his hopeful pupil when he came to her studio for a sitting, and there was something in this young man which at once alarmed and repelled her. To his patroness he was fawningly cringing and subservient; to Miss Shrosbery he was coldly polite; but towards Lady Clarissa he affected a familiar and even confidential manner, which filled her with secret terror and intensest repulsion. And the worst of it was that he did not by any means restrain

himself in the presence of Lady Orwell—on the contrary, he would venture upon broader jokes and more appalling familiarities when she was by; while, instead of resenting, she appeared rather to encourage his impertinence. Clarissa's cheeks would burn, and her fingers tremble with indignation, when the young man came alone into the room, exclaiming, "Well, Lady Clarissa, *ma belle*, and how goes the painting this morning? What a shame it is to keep you standing at that easel! I assure you I'd put an end to it, if I could, for you will never paint that fellow's mug ugly enough to make a real portrait. Shall you put in all his freckles—eh?"

It was the tone, even more than the words, that galled Clarissa; and as the weeks passed on, it grew worse and worse, till at length the girl made up her mind to appeal to the Countess, although some instinct told her beforehand that she would fail to find redress.

Accordingly, when her ladyship lingered one day to criticise the work, after the Earl and his obnoxious attendant had departed, Clarissa ventured to say, "Should you mind dispensing with Mr. Chatters' attendance, Lady Orwell? I find I cannot get on while he is here."

"What nonsense! What affectation!" exclaimed the Countess, still closely examining the picture. "I dare say now you think poor Chatters has quite lost his heart to you?"

"He would never *dare*," burst out Clarissa; "insolent and vain as he is, he would scarcely have the presumption to lift his eyes to the Earl's daughter! No, indeed! I complain of him as I should complain of any other servant who failed in the respect due to the ladies of the family."

"Oh, don't suppose I don't know!" replied her ladyship, with the most exasperating tone of leniency. "Young men will be young men, and girls will be girls; though, let me tell you, Clarissa, I think you are quite too young for anything of this sort. But I am not going to play the cruel stepmother."

"Anything of this sort! I protest I do not in the least understand your ladyship! If you mean that I am too young to be insulted, I quite agree with you—and I do

not know when I shall be old enough; perhaps, though, in years to come, I may be better able to crush impertinence."

"Clarissa, don't be a fool! If you go on like this, turning up your nose at every decent young man who is ridiculous enough to fancy you, when do you think you will get married?"

"I do not want to be married; certainly not at present. But Mr. Chatters can have no possible connection with that subject, and it is of him I wish to speak just now. He is too familiar; his tone, his manner displeases me."

"It is always a girl's own fault if a young man is too familiar. You should not have encouraged Chatters if you did not mean to meet him half way."

"I encourage him!" cried Clarissa, flaming out with scarlet cheeks and flashing eyes.

Lady Orwell had not seen her thus for years; indeed, she had never seen her thus, for this was not the passionate anger of the child, but the outraged dignity of the woman.

"Now, pray don't give way to temper," she interrupted, feeling just a little scared at this unexpected demonstration. "Nothing is gained by going into tantrums, as I have told you often enough before. I repeat it, that young men never take liberties if young ladies behave themselves modestly, and——"

But Clarissa was past all patience, and she haughtily demanded, "Do you then accuse me of forwardness, of want of modesty?"

"Don't try to pick a quarrel, Clarissa; let your own conscience tell you how you have behaved."

"As God is my witness, madam, my conscience acquits me. I only wish I were as guiltless on every other point as on this. You must have seen that Chatters has treated me with the greatest insolence, and that I have shown my displeasure in every way I could think of. Please to understand I complain only of the insolence of a servant, of an inferior."

"I don't know that Chatters is your inferior. He is a very respectable young man; his mother, he tells me, was cousin, but twice removed, to a bishop, and sister-in-law

to a certain person about the Court. And he gets his own living, which you don't; and he is not dependent upon anyone for his meat and drink, which you are. I don't see, young lady, in what your mighty superiority consists."

"I am my father's daughter, Lady Orwell; I am Lady Clarissa Oakleigh."

"Worse luck! Titles don't sit well upon paupers. If you were Miss Oakleigh, it would be all the better for you; you might go out governessing then. But who would engage a 'my lady' to teach their children, or to undertake the duties of companion? so don't, pray don't make a boast of your inconvenient title, which you owe to the mere accident of birth, and which you will find very much in your way, if I mistake not, seeing it goes along with an empty purse, and a face that will never make its owner's fortune!"

"I do not boast—I have had serious thoughts of laying down the empty, useless appellation. But, Lady Orwell, will you not protect me from Mr. Chatters?"

"I will protect you, if he presumes, certainly; but I have never yet seen anything in him which calls for rebuke. If he likes to talk to you, why should he not? Dear me! you must have a wonderfully high opinion of yourself, Clarissa. But remember

"'The real worth of anything,
Is just as much as it will bring.'"

And now let us end this silly discourse. Give me that glass. I want to examine your work. Why, what have you been about! My darling boy's mouth is not like that, so straight and so hard! and his poor nose! Dear me, Clarissa! it is more like a snout than a nose—so broad and flat! I could pinch out a better nose with a lump of putty."

Clarissa was silent, for the mouth and nose were to the life. And Lady Orwell went on—"His hair, too, is not that colour! You have made it whitey-brown."

"It is not finished; I shall lay on a warmer tint presently."

"And I hope the complexion is not finished either?"

That skin looks as if it wanted washing!" which indeed was the normal aspect of his small lordship's countenance: none of the Countess's children had inherited her bright complexion any more than the pale olive tints of their patrician father. The little ladies Louisa and Adeline alone had a touch of the brunette in their swarthy baby-faces. Again Clarissa was able to reply with truth that several flesh colours had yet to be laid on, and the Countess, in a tone of relief, observed, "Be sure, then, you choose the right colours; I won't allow my beautiful boy to go down to posterity with a complexion like an overboiled dumpling, or a bad tallow candle. And you must make more haste, for the dear child is tired of sitting, and I want the picture framed and hung early next month. And then,—if you don't displease me with your whims and airs, I'll perhaps sit to you myself! I think I'll be taken in character; Cleopatra or Helen of Troy. Yes, I decide on Cleopatra, only I'll be properly dressed; I will wear that crimson velvet robe I had for the fancy ball last season. And it will be a good opportunity for airing my jewels. But I make no promises; I must see what sort of picture you make of Lord Orwell before I quite make up my mind."

Later in the day Clarissa and Susan went to walk in the gardens. It was a beautiful April afternoon, warm and sunny, and the air was fragrant with the scent of hyacinths. They sat down, at last, in a remote summer-house, where they were little likely to be disturbed. Susan was very tired; the sudden heat which had set in a day or two before made her more languid than usual; and Clarissa was ill at ease, for the conduct of Mr. Chatters annoyed her, and the Countess's indifference perplexed her, and filled her with undefined and serious apprehensions.

"I really do not think Orwell suits me," said Susan, after they had rested for a few minutes in silence; "I wonder if it is too damp, or too relaxing, or what! I always feel so indescribably weary, after the least exertion; my limbs are so heavy I have to drag them, and my heart scarcely seems to beat at all sometimes. Tonics don't do me any good either; I must get into a more bracing air,

or else I shall die—and I do not want to do that just yet, for your sake, my pet.”

“If you were to die, Susan—which God forbid!—I should be the most desolate creature in the world. What *did* Dr. Hammond say, after he had pounded you about so, yesterday?”

“He solemnly assured me that my *lungs* were quite sound! a fact which I never doubted, for I have no cough, and no pain in my chest. But he admitted that the action of the heart was feeble, too feeble for good health, and that I must avoid shocks—as if one could avoid a shock, if it comes in one’s way! I told him I thought Orwell air did not suit me; and he replied that perhaps it did not—it particularly disagreed with some people! He advised me to go back to Surrey as fast as possible, and I told him I would; for though never strong, even as a child, I was always in very fair health at Buttermeads, and I love the Surrey hills. And, Clarissa, I heard from Mr. Hadfield this morning—he is very unwell, poor old man, and writes despondingly; he is breaking up, he says, and I am inclined to believe it; he is over seventy, you know: I am not sure but that he is well on for eighty. But he tells me that he has almost concluded terms for a charming cottage residence, about two miles from Deepfields—on the Northdowns, you know! The house is small, but convenient, and very pretty; the grounds extensive, comparatively, beautifully laid-out, and in first-rate order! There is good stabling for the useful cob we mean to drive, and a small paddock, where we can pasture a nice little cow; a hen-house, and piggery *ornée*; a productive kitchen-garden, bee-hives, and everything else—even a tiny hot-house, and a good-sized conservatory, opening from the drawing-room. I suppose I ought to go and see it! Mr. Hadfield urges me to come up to town for a few days to survey my proposed estate, for I can either buy it outright, or have it at a fixed rent, on a long lease; and also to consult a London physician, for Mr. Hadfield seems to imagine I am very much out of health. Moreover, he thinks you had better accompany me, *if* practicable!”

“You may well emphasize the ‘if!’ I am afraid it is altogether *impracticable*. Lady Orwell will never consent.”

"I must try my powers of oratory and persuasion, for I do want you to go with me. I should like you so much to pass your opinion on the house. I will buy it at once if you really approve it."

"Better take it on a short lease, with power to purchase within a limited period. I have heard Madame Pierrot say—and she was such a shrewd woman of business—that no one should buy a house until he had lived in it through all the four seasons of the year."

"You prudent little thing! You do justice to Madame's excellent training. Your speech convinces me that I ought, in mere justice to myself, to take you up with me, for the benefit of your good advice and far-seeing judgment. By hook or by crook, I must get the better of my lady."

"It would be charming! It would do my very heart good to feel the London pavement under my feet again! And you *may* prevail with the Countess; if anyone on earth can do it, it is yourself. It would be delightful to get away just now—quite a relief."

"I think I know what you mean!"

"You have witnessed the insolence—the intolerable forwardness—of that young man Chatters?"

"My dear Clarissa, without, I hope, being of a very malicious and unwomanly turn of mind, and without being, as I do think, really un-Christian, I have felt once or twice that I could give that most insufferable young fellow a ducking in the horsepond opposite the blacksmith's, with all possible satisfaction! It would not drown him, or even injure him; and such a shock as sousing him for half a minute in muddy water *might* bring him to his senses!"

"How dare he behave as he does?"

"I cannot imagine. In your dear father's lifetime he would not have dared."

"I don't like to think so, Susan, but I cannot help fancying that he is, in some sort, encouraged by Lady Orwell."

"At any rate, she does not give him a regular '*setting-down*,' such as would effectually silence a mere arrogant, cowardly pretender, as he evidently is. I have seen

much and said little, Clarissa ; but I mean, God willing, to carry you off with me next week. We will stay a full fortnight in London ; Mrs. Hadfield will provide for the proprieties, &c. That will bring us well on into May ; and then—only two months remain to be disposed of ! And during that period, we must do the best we can. I must try my hand at bringing the miserable Chatters into subjection, if the Countess refuse to do her part, and if your haughty coldness have no effect. There are some men whom an Arctic winter could not freeze ; the Deluge itself could not wash out their intolerable self-conceit and presumption !—and, if I mistake not, ‘ Alf Chatters,’ as he calls himself, is a person of that stamp.”

“ I think so, too, and I am sure he is the very worst tutor that poor little Orwell could possibly have. Do you know I cannot help fancying that Lady Orwell would really countenance him if—if—he pretended——”

“ If he made love to you ! I am afraid she *might* act so unworthily ! But sooner than it shall come to that, Clary darling, sooner than you shall be exposed to such an indignity, we will elope together ! The world cannot be very hard upon an elopement when *both* the runaways are women, and one of them flying from insult and injustice.”

“ I hope you do not think I despise Chatters simply because he is a tutor, Susan ? ”

“ Clary dear, you would despise him if he were heir to a dukedom. Neither you nor I, I hope, would ever despise a man because he was obliged to earn money for his own or for others’ support. But there are tutors and tutors !—a *soi-disant* tutor may be a gentleman, or he may not ! One thing is certain—Chatters is no more a gentleman than that Mr. Thompson, the new steward, whose every look and word I cannot help distrusting. Nor is he a tutor, in reality—he is only a masculine nursery-governess, with a great deal more of the stable-yard about him than the library. Little Orwell is badly disposed enough, poor child ! but this man will make bad worse ; and what *worse* will come to, unless speedy measures are taken, I dare not contemplate.”

“ Poor little Orwell ! He is a most unlovable child ; one does not know how to get a hold on him. To think

that he really is my dear father's son! Nor does he much resemble his mother. It is very curious."

"You may depend upon it, he is the exact reproduction of some vulgar maternal relative,—grandfather or uncle, perhaps! I cannot bear to think that he is Earl of Orwell!"

Clarissa sighed, and they sat for several minutes without speaking; then Susan said, "I am getting a little chilly; I was so very warm when we came in. Shall we have a look at the new auriculas, and then walk quietly home?"

Clarissa assented, and they strolled quietly round the plot where the best auriculas were just coming into flower, and then turned into a shaded walk that wound round to the back of the summer-house, where they had been sitting. It was growing dark, very dark, under the shadows of the thick, tall evergreens, but they were not far from the house, and the path was a familiar one. Suddenly, just as they reached an opening in the laurels, close behind the summer-house, someone, with a stentorian shout, leaped from among the bushes, and seized upon Susan, almost jumping on her back. The shock threw her down. It happened in a second or two, the roar like that of an angry bull, and the attack; and neither of the girls had imagined that any living creature was near them. The next moment Clarissa recognised her brother; she was trembling from head to foot, and could scarcely command her voice. "You bad, naughty boy!" she exclaimed in the passion of the moment. "You have nearly frightened us to death! Look at poor Susan—help me to pick her up."

"I sha'n't! I've only startled her! what chicken-hearted fools girls are! I heard her call me names, and I heard what you said, too, miss; and I shall tell ma, and won't you catch it just, that's all! I hope I have frightened you both; I meant to;—I wanted to punish you." And with a whoop that woke all the echoes of the place, he was off.

But Susan still lay motionless, and evidently insensible, for when Clarissa piteously begged her to speak, she made no sign. To lift her unaided from the damp ground was

impossible; the utmost she could do was to raise her into sitting posture. She tried and tried again, and then set off, as fast as she could run, to the stable-yard, where she would be pretty sure to find assistance. Crossing one of the kitchen-gardens, she encountered the head-nurse, who was looking everywhere for Lord Orwell. He had run away when he was told that it was nearly bedtime.

Clarissa breathlessly explained, and both hurried to the spot where Susan was. She was still insensible, and two of the men-servants had to be summoned before she could be conveyed to her own room. And when they laid her down on the sofa she showed no sign of returning consciousness. Her face was deadly white, her hands were cold; Clarissa could not detect the faintest pulse; and turning to the housekeeper, she said, "That wicked boy has killed Miss Shrosbery."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LIGHT AT EVENING TIME.

"Death is the brother of Love, twin-brother is he, and is only
 More austere to behold. With a kiss upon lips that are fading,
 Takes he the soul, and departs; and, rocked in the arms of
 affection,
 Places the ransomed child, new born, 'fore the face of its
 Father;
 Sounds of his coming already I hear—see dimly his pinions,
 Swart as the night, but with stars strewn upon them I fear not
 before him.
 Death is only release, and in mercy is mute."

"Death cannot come to him untimely, who is fit to die."

"WHAT is all this I hear?" presently exclaimed the Countess, as she bustled into the room. "What is the matter with Miss Shrosbery, and what has Lord Orwell to do with it?"

Very briefly Clarissa explained; she was too anxious about Susan to give much attention to anyone else just then. The Countess, however, strongly resented the blame imputed to her spoiled darling; she was quite sure that it was no fault of his, whatever had transpired. "Such nonsense!" she observed, when the story had been told; "as if a child's play could make anyone so ill! All the world might have shouted in my ears when I was young, and I should not have cared; but then, we did not trouble ourselves about nervous systems in those days! I should have been ashamed to faint because I was a little startled!"

"A little startled!" replied Clarissa, indignantly; "nerves of iron might have been shaken by such a sudden, hideous uproar. My first notion was that some wild beast had broken loose and sprung out upon us. I am by no means a nervous person, but my heart beat violently with the shock. I could not scream for want of breath."

"Such foolishness!" again remarked the Countess. "You must have recognised Orwell's voice, and you know what high spirits the dear boy has. Really, these continual fainting fits are extremely inconvenient and disagreeable! I shall not be sorry when Susan is safely established in a home of her own. A person who swoons at every trifle is not fit to form one of a large family, and children will be children—bless the dear lambs!"

Clarissa was too angry to trust herself to make further rejoinder, only she wondered what young lions and tiger-cubs were like, if her brothers and sisters were *lambs*. Susan at length drew a deep breath, and opened her eyes, and at the same moment Dr. Hammond entered. One of the upper servants had, on her own responsibility, despatched a swift messenger to him. The Countess, careless as she seemed, was really relieved by his appearance; she did not like the peculiar, death-like tint on Susan's face, and even while she delivered her objurgations against fainting, she was thinking how very awkward it would be if this attack should prove anything worse than a common swoon. The Doctor looked very grave as he felt his patient's pulse, and laid his hand upon the region of the heart. Then he took from his pocket a small phial, let

fall several drops into a teaspoon, and placed it between the colourless cold lips. Afterwards he watched the effect with so much intentness, that the Countess was surprised, and again she asked herself was there *really* anything to be apprehended.

More than an hour elapsed before the Doctor permitted Susan to be moved, nor would he allow her to speak, even in a whisper.

"Not a word," he said, imperatively, as she tried to say something to Clarissa. "I shall prepare a cordial, after taking which you must go to sleep—all depends upon perfect quietude. I will be with you again early in the morning."

And when he left the invalid's chamber he did not quit the Castle, but requested a private interview with Lady Orwell.

"It's nothing very much, I suppose?" said her ladyship, who by this time was taking a little light refreshment in her boudoir, intending speedily to retire.

"*Nothing!*" repeated the Doctor severely. "It has been one of the narrowest escapes from sudden death! I would not have had this happen for any money—nothing *could* have been worse for Miss Shrosbery than a violent and sudden shock."

"The child only jumped out upon her and shouted for fun, as children will, you know. It was all done in play."

"If a child of mine indulged in such play, I would soon thrash it out of him. Such shocks are most injurious to persons in ordinary health, but to anyone who has the smallest tendency to heart disease they may be *fatal*! It might have been my painful duty to communicate with the coroner, Lady Orwell. I have known death result from less disturbance of the pulses."

"What ails Susan Shrosbery?" asked the Countess, all aghast. "You don't mean seriously to say that a mere jar of the nerves could have killed her?"

"But I do say so, and most seriously, too! *Such a jar!* I don't know anything more calculated to shake one to the life's core than a sudden fright, such as Lord Orwell gave Miss Shrosbery. Let me beg you to punish him as he deserves; let him receive a lesson which he will

not easily forget; let him understand clearly how terribly near he has been to committing a murder! You ask what Miss Shrosbery's malady is? I have already told your ladyship that she has incurable heart disease."

"Ah! but many a person who is said to have heart disease lives to old age, or dies of something else."

"And Miss Shrosbery may live for some years. She may even attain to middle life, though I think it unlikely. But a shock such as she has now received does the work of years in a few minutes; I greatly fear that it may hasten the end."

"Send off for Sir Samuel immediately!" responded the now alarmed lady. "Oh, dear! I would not have anything happen through the dear innocent child's frolic for a million of money! Think how people—*cruel* people—would cast it up to him all his life long! Of course he would not be to blame, but there would be the slur—it would be a sort of reflection on him always."

"No doubt. But Sir Samuel could do nothing that is not already done; and I know what his opinion would be. Indeed, he told me when he was down here that Miss Shrosbery's state of health was most precarious. He spoke to me privately, and I am sure I repeated to your ladyship what passed between us."

"I know you did; but I could not believe it to be the truth. Those great physicians are always such alarmists. Besides, he made no examination—he only judged by looks, and she was naturally a good deal out of sorts, since she persisted in acting as nurse to my poor dear lord."

"There is no doubt that the Earl's illness and death tended to the development of Miss Shrosbery's malady; anything causing fatigue and anxiety would do that; and I am greatly afraid lest this sad affair should bring to light fresh symptoms with which it will be very difficult to cope."

"I insist on Sir Samuel being consulted."

"I will write to him to-morrow, if you wish it; though he is not at all celebrated for cardiac diseases, and I should not be at all surprised if he sent some other leading physician in his stead—someone who has particularly

studied this phase of malady. Dr. John Lorton would be the man whom I should wish to consult. He has made cardiac disease his special study, and he knows more about aneurism than any man alive."

"Very well! Send for him, then. That girl must not die of her fright. You must get her over this, Dr. Hammond, or it will be on my poor, sweet boy's hapless head for ever."

"I will do all I can. In the meantime, let me impress upon you the absolute necessity of perfect quiet. Lady Clarissa and old nurse will take charge of my patient, and I shall leave all orders with the former. I shall be here before breakfast-time to-morrow morning."

"And there is no immediate danger?"

"Not now, I trust, or I would not leave Miss Shrobery. I only fear lest latent mischief should be suddenly called into activity; my dread is lest evils which might have been staved off indefinitely should speedily supervene. To-night's work is dismally like putting the slow match to the train which shall presently explode the mine."

Next day Susan was decidedly better. She would even have got up and gone about her usual occupations had she been permitted, but Dr. Hammond insisted that she should not even attempt to rise, assuring her that she did now know how much she was shaken, and that she was weaker than she supposed. So she lay quite still on her bed for several days, while Clarissa remained in close attendance; and as she looked not much the worse, Lady Orwell's fears were once more allayed, and she began to flatter herself that she had been unnecessarily frightened. Of course the author of the mischief received no punishment; indeed, he was but slightly reprimanded, and he coolly justified his conduct, on the vulgar plea of "*serve 'em right!*"

"But do you know what would have happened if Susan had died?" asked the mother, with a serious air.

"No! nor I don't care!" was the insolent reply.

"Those who kill other people are *hanged!*" pursued her ladyship with awful gravity. "Think what it would be to be hung up by your neck till you were dead!"

His lordship burst into a derisive laugh. "What a crammer!" he cried out. "Why, I know they wouldn't hang me if I didn't kill her on purpose, for I asked Chatters. And I did not mean to kill her—I only meant to frighten her almost to death! It was such fun; I heard them coming, and I hid myself among those great laurels, just where it was darkest, and when they were right opposite I leaped out—oh! with such a roar and a *bellow*, like Farmer Simkin's bull when he is ever so mad—and I jumped right on Miss Susan's back and knocked her over! Down she came all in a lump. And wasn't Clary frightened, too! Didn't she sob and scold, and shake all over! Oh my! wasn't it fun! I should like to do it over again."

"You naughty, bad boy! If ever you do such a thing again, you shall be shut up in the dark room for days and days, and kept on dry bread and water. I've a great mind to make you beg Susan Shrosbery's pardon!"

"Oh, yes! I dare say! I'm not going to beg anybody's pardon—I'm the Earl of Orwell! And Chatters says noblemen are never hanged; whatever they do, they are not treated like common people. Only if they are guilty of high treason they have their heads chopped off; and high treason is killing, or trying to kill, the king, and I shall never do that. So I am all safe."

"Not half so safe as you fancy. And now go away, and don't play such pranks again. You'll find out some day you cannot murder people, even though you are a nobleman."

And thus reprimanded, his lordship departed, to converse further with Mr. Chatters on the important subject of capital punishment, as applied to the British peerage, and to himself especially.

At the end of a week, Susan was up and about again. But she was strangely altered. The slightest exertion made her breathless; if she moved too quickly, even from one side of the room to the other, she turned pale, and panted; and she could only ascend the broad, easy staircase a step or two at a time. Dr. John Lorton came, but he made only a very cursory examination; the slightest possible auscultation was sufficient to reveal the truth. He

quietly told the Countess that no medical science could possibly avail; that Miss Shrosbery's days were numbered and that it was only a case of time, perhaps of months but certainly not of years; perhaps of weeks—it might even be of *days*! And there could not be the slightest doubt that serious access of disease had been produced by the shock of that unfortunate evening. In the meantime, the patient must be kept very quiet and undisturbed, live by rule, take certain medicine—which was really disguised alcohol—and, above all else, remain in ignorance of her precarious situation. But, notwithstanding all precautions, the end *might*—probably would—come suddenly.

As for Susan herself, she was blandly told that she was in a delicate and even dangerous state of health, that her heart was certainly "*affected*," and that she must take every care and observe most strictly the regimen prescribed. And then, Dr. Lorton trusted that when he paid his next visit he should find her much improved, and on the way to a perfect recovery! Susan did not reply, and the physician silently wondered whether she distrusted his dictum—though on the whole he rather thought she accepted it, as most women do accept the judgment of their doctor, for she seemed so calm, so self-possessed, so free from anything approaching to agitation. If he had spoken the naked truth, he would have told his patient that she was as literally under sentence of death as any criminal in Newgate, and that at any moment might arrive the warrant for instant execution.

A day or two afterwards Susan asked Dr. Hammond to tell her exactly what she might expect. "Dr. Lorton flattered me with the hope of ultimate recovery; but I knew it was only flattery," she pursued; "he kindly wished to raise my spirits, that was all."

"And that was much," replied Dr. Hammond. "You know the strange power of imagination. If a man makes up his mind that he is going to die, he immediately changes a mere possibility into a probability more or less defined. People may actually worry themselves into fatal illness. I heard the other day of a curious case,* on the Continent. An experiment was made upon a criminal

* A fact.

under sentence of death; he was offered his life if he would consent to sleep in a bed in which a cholera patient had just died. He accepted, underwent the ordeal, and died in a few hours after, in all the agonies of Asiatic cholera. Now, the bed in which he lay was not at all infected; no one had died in it; no cholera patient had ever approached it! In fact, he was its first occupant; it was simply the terrible power, the *tyranny* of the imagination."

"It was curious," returned Susan, "but I doubt not, quite true. My own case, however, is quite different. I *know* that I am what people would call dying! I know that no power on earth can save me; but as I have several things to do, important business to transact, I should wish to have some idea of the time that may be granted."

"My dear Miss Shrosbery, now you are seeing ghosts in broad daylight."

"Will you be so good as to tell me *the truth*, the whole truth, about myself? It will not hurt me; it will comfort me in every way. If one must go on a long journey, it is well to make all needful preparations at once."

"My dear young lady, I am sure such preparation in your case cannot be necessary. So good, so pious as you are, you need not be afraid of death."

"You are right. I am no more afraid of death than I am of my own shadow; but not because of my own goodness. It is that I know in whom I have trusted, and that *He* is as strong and as loving in all worlds as in this. Death does not, cannot, divide us from God; therefore, why should we fear it? And what we *call* death is in reality only the short passage between this poor life and a better—the threshold of another and more glorious state of being. One should wait for death as for a kind friend, whom God will one day send to us to lead us into His presence."

"Is it possible that you can so calmly contemplate dissolution? Do you not fear the grave at all?"

"Why should I? What is the grave to me? *I* myself, my *ego*, will not be there, any more than it is at this very moment. Let the worn-out garment of the flesh perish, when the soul has for ever left it; the sooner

it moulders into earth the better. But I! I shall be with God."

"It is to me utterly incomprehensible! I am no coward, I believe, and I hope, when my hour comes, I shall meet my fate like a man."

"Better meet it like a Christian! The mere manhood that is in us *must* shrink from death; it is the Christianity which Christ has taught us that gives us the triumph over it. It is through Jesus Christ that God gives us the victory, and teaches us to say: 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' Now, will you not tell me the truth? How long have I, as far as you know, to live in this world?"

Dr. Hammond was silent, partly because he could scarcely speak from emotion. The calm composure with which this young girl faced the spectre he so dreaded struck him profoundly; and he longed to know, *to share*, the secret of her peace. "That is a question I scarcely know how to answer," he at length replied, "because—because life, which is at the best uncertain, is peculiarly so in *cardiac*—in this kind of heart affection."

"You mean that death may come at any moment? It may not be just yet—it may be some months hence, or it may be to-day—*now!*"

"Just so. Only, let me tell you that I do sincerely believe that, unless you have some sudden shock, you will live through the summer, perhaps to the very close of autumn."

"Thank you! I am so glad I know. I shall take every care, every precaution, because I do want to live several months longer, till I have passed my twenty-first birthday. I want very much to make my will, which I cannot do till I attain my majority. But that I must leave in God's hands; He knows best. It is on Lady Clarissa's account that I am anxious. I wish her to have the £20,000 that I inherit by my father's will. If I die before the fifteenth of July—little more than two months hence—the money goes to distant members of the family, whom I have never seen, and who, as I believe, are already wealthy. After or on my birthday, I can will it to whomsoever I wish. So do all you can, please, to prolong my life till then."

"I will. But you can do more for yourself than I can! Be more than prudent; be self-indulgent even. Let nothing tempt you to exertion; eat moderately of nourishing food; lie down a good deal, but not continuously; take the air when you feel disposed, but never walk for more than a few minutes at a time; and, finally, keep your medicine, or else a little finest Cognac brandy—it does not matter which—close at hand, and take some the moment you feel ever so little faint."

"Thank you. I will remember."

This was early in May, when the hawthorns and lilacs were in full beauty. A few days later came the tidings that Mr. Hadfield had "had a stroke"—news which surprised nobody. "It is only what I quite expected," said Susan to Clarissa; "the poor old man was sadly changed when he was here last. I wondered once or twice which of us would be the first to go. In a business point of view, it will make no difference to us, for the sons are fully instructed, and, as partners or successors, can carry out all arrangements. But you will lose a friend, Clary."

"A very true friend. Susan, it seems as if I were to be left desolate. I heard only this morning that dear old Sweetie cannot last long. This world seems like one vast graveyard."

"What is the matter with Mrs. Sweetapple?"

"Nothing but old age, I believe. A general decay, Dr. Hammond says. I do not think she has ever been quite the same since she was deposed from office, and certainly she has been more or less an invalid ever since she went to live at the Woodland Lodge. She has had trouble in her family, too—one of her grandsons has turned out wild, and got into sad disgrace. He very narrowly escaped transportation, I heard papa say. Poor old Sweetie!"

"God will send you new friends, dear—take my word for it! He has love and friendship in His inexhaustible stores of blessing, just as He has everything else. All that is empty He will replenish; all that is lacking He will give; all that seems lost He will restore—for God is good, beyond all that we can possibly conceive. I feel it now more than ever. Yes! God *is* love."

And so, peacefully and calmly, the flowery spring deepened into the full sweet summer-time, the May blossoms faded, and the June roses came in all their fragrant beauty, the earth was once more "apparelled in celestial light." It was one of those rare, warm, genial summers which visit us now and then, as if from happier climes. The gardens and the woods were glorious; never were such lilies and roses, such luscious honeysuckle, such perfume of carnations, such delicate scent of eglantine. Never were such lovely mornings, such golden afternoons, such balmy crimson evenings, such wondrous sunsets! And Susan, who knew that these were for her the last fair flowers of earth, that it was for the last time she inhaled the fragrance of the blossoming limes, of the new-mown hay, and of the clustering acacias, said, "Oh! is it not kind of God to let me have such a beautiful summer for my last? I feel like a poor, sick, tired child, whose indulgent father gives it not only all it wants, but all that it can wish for! And if this world be so lovely, what has *my* Father not laid up for me in the many mansions? It makes me think of the hymn my dear aunt was so fond of quoting on splendid summer evenings:—

" 'Oh God, oh good beyond compare,
If thus Thy meaner works are fair,
If thus Thy bounties gild the span
Of ruined earth and sinful man,
How glorious must the mansions be,
When Thy redeemed shall dwell with Thee!'

Only, Clary, I do not like the expression—*ruined earth*!—the earth itself is so sweet, and pure, and good—it is man that makes the ruin. I love the earth, because God's thought is always touching it; because He has fashioned it so beautifully; because creation, which some people seem to think was all finished and done with thousands of years ago, is continually being renewed—one everlasting resurrection miracle."

Lady Orwell did not interfere with the friends, who knew so well that they were on the eve of separation. Perhaps she felt that it would be useless. Perhaps she feared to incur the censure which would fall upon her, if

by any vexation she accelerated the crisis, which must come, sooner or later. Or, let us hope, that out of pure kindness she refrained from troubling them; but, as she disliked the sight of illness, she seldom visited the girls' apartments.

One beautiful evening—the evening of Midsummer-day—the Countess did come in person to inquire how the invalid was, and finding her very much better, and in excellent spirits, she sat down and took out her knitting, saying she would sit with them for half an hour. “You will get well after all, you’ll see,” she presently observed. “Why, you have quite a colour! And I think your fingers are not so thin! You’ll cheat the doctors yet, Susan.”

“I think not,” she replied cheerfully. “I know how much this seeming improvement is worth. A lamp, you know, sometimes burns more brightly as it sinks down in the socket—but only for a little while—only for a very little while.”

“Why!” exclaimed the Countess, in her usual blunt style, “you think no more of dying than I do of going to bed.”

“Lady Orwell,” said Susan, sweetly but gravely, “let me entreat you to think of the change that *must* come to you, as well as to me. Do you not hear Christ knocking at the door of your heart? Oh! let Him in! surrender yourself to Him; and then—then, you will soon find that the bitterness of death has passed away for ever. Remember these words, I pray you, when I am no longer here.”

Very much affected, the Countess promised she would, but she soon rose and took her leave; “serious conversation” was her horror—next to death itself. After she was gone, Susan and Clarissa sat and watched the dying sunset—the purple and gold and crimson clouds that floated like king’s banners on the far horizon. From the terrace below came the sweet perfume of flowers; the tall, white lilies gleamed through the deepening dusk; one by one stole out the stars of night, in the dark blue dome above.

“Is it not lovely?” said Susan, pressing Clarissa’s hand. “Clary, my life has been one long sweet sunshine

—even its one sorrow was not all dark ! and the sweetness and the brightness grow and grow as the end approaches. Surely, surely, dear, this is *light at evening-time !*”

It was even so ! For Susan had already dawned that light that never fades, that knows no fall of eve ! They still sat by the open window, close together, hand clasped in hand, when Clarissa felt the pressure of her friend’s fingers closer upon her own. It was only for a second, however ; then gradually they relaxed their hold—there was a little fluttering of the breath, a long-drawn sigh, and Clarissa knew that the Angel of Death swept through the silent, shadowy room—and all was over ! A white, cold form lay back upon the pillows, and Susan Shrosbery was safe from all this life’s cares, and toils, and perils.

CHAPTER XXXV.

“NOTHING LEFT TO LOVE.”

“It is only Life that can fear dying
Possible loss means possible gain ;
Those who still dread are not quite forsaken ;
But not to fear, because all is taken,
Is the loneliest depth of human pain.”

For the first time since the commencement of their relationship, the Countess showed some real kindness to Clarissa—inasmuch as she left her to indulge her grief without restraint. She even, on the day of the funeral, tried to administer a little comfort. “It’s no use fretting, child,” she observed, with an evident intention to console ; “it’s of no earthly use crying our eyes out for those that are gone. Not all the tears and lamentations in the world can bring them back again ; and for them, you know, it’s a happy exchange. And if ever there was anybody certain of heaven, it was poor Susan. I really think

it was all one to her, whether she died or lived; though, if she had any choice, it was for death, I should say. It's a pity, though, all that fine property going to the Thomas Shrosberys! She meant you to have it, I understand. You must be disappointed, I am sure. And to think if she had lived barely three weeks longer, she would have made her will, and left you her heiress! Dear me! how uncertain everything in this life is! The Bible may well say, 'Boast not thyself of to-morrow.'"

Clarissa tried to feel grateful for this rough sympathy, but she found it no easy task. At first she was so stunned—for, in spite of the saddest anticipations, the wrench at last had been sudden—that she scarcely realised how much she had lost; but, as days passed on, she felt that now she was alone in the world. Orphaned, portionless, and friendless—she was desolate indeed. She looked round the rooms in which she and Susan had lived together so happily, and there was everything to remind her of the pleasant intercourse, of the sweet counsel, of the true, deep affection which had been hers for nearly a whole year. There was the sofa on which Susan had spent so many peaceful hours in the last weeks of her life; there was her work-basket, with its contents, just as she had left them when for the last time she laid aside her needle; there were the books they had studied, and the music they had practised together; the collection of seaweeds they had made during their pleasant sojourn at Southbourne; the very volume which had been in reading on the last afternoon, still with the marker in it; and on the easel was an unfinished drawing of Buttermeads, which Clarissa was copying from Susan's hasty sketch.

Everything reminded the solitary survivor of her dear departed companion; and, lost in painful musings and passionate regrets, she scarcely thought of the future that remained to her, or of the probable lot awaiting her. She was roused at last by the Countess, who, having left her to herself for a full fortnight, thought she had been quite as indulgent as could be expected of her. It was high time, she said, that Clarissa should begin to bestir herself, and take her proper place in the family, now that that fair vision of a home among the breezy Surrey hills had

vanished like a sunset cloud. Accordingly unannounced, and quite unexpectedly, she bustled into the old school-room one morning early, and found Clarissa, with the traces of tears on her cheeks, sadly contemplating the portrait of her friend. Some needlework was at her feet : it had slipped from her hands, and lay there unheeded ; she was apparently lost in her own sad reflections.

"Come ! come ! Clarissa, this will never do !" began the Countess, briskly, but not harshly ; "you have had plenty of time for fretting, and thinking, and remembering, and all that, and now you really must rouse yourself, and set to work with a will. You are not expected to lead a life of idleness, I suppose ? You are ready to do what you can for your own support ?"

"Oh, yes ; quite ready," replied Clarissa, driving back the rising tears, and steadying her voice. "I forgot—I did not think—I will do anything you wish." At that moment she cared very little, poor girl, what she did or what became of her ; all she wished was not to displease her stepmother, to avoid those taunts and reproaches which were always so bitter to endure.

Lady Orwell might send her into the nursery now ; into the scullery, into the laundry, if she pleased ! She felt for the moment that it mattered little what her position in the household might henceforth be. Like poor, stricken Marie Antoinette, of whom Madame Pierrot had told her so much, she was ready to exclaim, "Nothing can hurt me now !" Drearily she recollected a line in Byron's "Corsair," "With nothing left to love, there's nought to dread !" And like one in a dismal dream, she hopelessly repeated it again and again—"Nothing left to love ! no, nothing left to love !"

"I am glad to find you so sensible," was the Countess's rejoinder ; "for I could not answer to my own conscience if I permitted you to go on leading this most useless kind of life. While poor Susan lived you had your duties, of course ; it was needful that someone should be her nurse and constant companion, and as she preferred you to any other person, I would not, in her state, thwart her ; so I left you to your own devices. Since her death, I have waited patiently, expecting that you would come and ask me what you were

to do! As you have not, I come to you, and bid you at once prepare to lead an active, cheerful, useful life in my nursery."

"I am ready," said Clarissa, in the same dull, abstracted way as that in which she had already spoken.

"Oh! but that tone won't do!" replied the Countess, sharply. "A person who has to do with children must be animated, spirited, full of energy, and agreeably disposed."

"I will try," began Clarissa again, but in vain she essayed to put on an air of interest and cheerfulness.

"I hope you will," was Lady Orwell's curt, trite answer, and she spoke as if she were not at all disposed to be trifled with; it was very clear that she looked for something more than mere verbal promises.

"Now then," she resumed, "that subject being settled, let us approach another. Where are Susan's keys? I must look through her papers."

"She left that for me to do," replied Clarissa, awakening to a sense of all the difficulties before her. "She burnt a great many papers and letters as soon as she knew her danger; the rest she looked over and arranged; they were chiefly memoranda of her own, and of no use to anybody, but, as she rightly imagined, interesting and valuable to me."

"Still, I choose to look through them; you are no relation of hers, remember! Give me the keys directly."

"Pray do not be angry, but *I cannot*. She expressly desired that no eye but mine should see what she had written."

"How am I to know that you speak the truth? You need not to be very famous for it, you know!"

"Lady Orwell," returned Clarissa, calmly, "I never told you a falsehood, and therefore you have no right to charge me with deceit. I never in all my life, since I knew right from wrong, told a lie to anyone."

"Well, suppose I assume that you are speaking the truth at this moment, how can I ascertain whether you really understood poor Susan? What can a girl like you have to do with such responsibilities?"

"I have not to do with any responsibilities. Mr. Hadfield has charge of all that is responsible—all business matters rest with him."

"Old Hadfield, indeed! Why, he has got one foot in the grave and the other slipping after it! He has lost his speech, and his memory, and, indeed, all his faculties! It is of no use my appealing to him."

"I should have said, 'Hadfield and Sons;' it is all the same thing."

"It is not, I tell you. I will have nought to do with those sons, who are more insolent even than their foolish father. My own business is pretty well transferred to Messrs. Tarriton and Dunn, and I wash my hands of the Hadfields."

"But Messrs. Tarriton and Dunn cannot touch Susan's affairs. Those *must* be left entirely with the Hadfields."

Lady Orwell knew that this was only fact, and the knowledge ruffled her temper not a little. In truth, she had received a letter from Mr. Thomas Hadfield only that morning, in which he had politely informed her that she had nothing whatever to do with the late Miss Shrosbery's affairs; that her property reverted to those persons expressly named in her father's will as her successors should it happen that she died before her twenty-first birthday; that all her just debts—if she had any—and her funeral expenses would be fully paid by the firm of Hadfield and Sons, they having certain funds at their disposal for all such liabilities. What remained, when all expenses were defrayed, they would hold in trust for Lady Clarissa Oakleigh, in accordance with the written injunctions of their late client. It was also mentioned that the sum thus bequeathed could not be a large one; it being simply the residue of Miss Shrosbery's allowance as a minor, and she had, as a rule, spent her income generously, not having, as she conceived—till very lately—any reason or motive for economy. The money which had accumulated during the last ten years went with the twenty thousand pounds originally left to Miss Shrosbery; and the small fortune which came from the deceased lady's own mother—Mr. Peter Shrosbery's first wife—returned, as Lady Orwell must be well aware, to the Marriotts of Buttermeads.

All this the Countess had already pondered and digested as well as she could. It can scarcely be said that she grudged poor Clarissa a few paltry hundreds, of which she

stood in no need herself; but she had fully resolved that the girl should not in any way be independent of herself. She was determined, as she herself expressed it, "*to keep her under*, and, if she rebelled, to make her lick the dust!" It somehow gave her the intensest satisfaction to reflect that Clarissa, whom she so hated, was at last entirely in her power. She had no longer her father to take her part, and justify her conduct, whatever it might be; and she had no Susan now to furnish her with the means of living elegantly and comfortably, if not in accordance with her rank as an Earl's daughter. She had absolutely nothing but her own charity on which to rely for future maintenance. And, as a dependent, Clarissa was expected meekly to bow her neck, accept the yoke, and regale herself with humble pie from January to December. At present it seemed that Clarissa knew nothing about the money which the Messrs. Hadfield held in trust for her, and the Countess amiably resolved that she should *not* know, as long as she could withhold the fact. After all, it was less even than Lady Orwell fancied, for there were several heavy bills to pay, and poor Susan had never dreamed of saving before she knew Clarissa. It was a wonder, indeed, that so much actually was left.

In the end, the Countess was obliged to go away baffled. Clarissa steadily declined to hand over Susan's keys; and it may be supposed that this refusal in no way tended to soothe her stepmother's temper, or to make matters smoother between the two, who seemed fated to remain in perpetual antagonism. She could not for shame dispossess Clarissa of Susan's dressing-case and workbox, her books, clothes, and other personal properties which had been openly and in the presence of several witnesses given to her, though she would have liked well enough to do so—not, as we before remarked, from absolute greed and covetousness, but from the extreme repulsion which she experienced towards every sort of arrangement which tended to enrich the unfortunate Clarissa. Lady Orwell was singularly blind to her own defects, though wonderfully keen-sighted as to other folks' shortcomings; and also her moral perceptions were not naturally acute or clear, so that she never once suspected the meanness and

malignity of the sentiments she fostered with regard to her step-daughter, and there was no one—now that Mr. Hadfield was gone—to hold up to her the mirror of truth, and show her the hideous reflection of her own character. Yet every Sunday she prayed, or was supposed to pray, for deliverance from “envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness.” She had probably heard the words till she ceased to connect with them any meaning, far less anything like an actual supplication.

“What am I to do in the nursery?” asked Clarissa, at length.

“Anything there is to do!” was the sharp reply. “Amuse the little ones, teach the elder ones, see to their behaviour, and, above all things, never let them get out of temper. There is far too much fighting and quarrelling among them, and it is entirely the fault of those stupid women in the nurseries. There would be no better children in the world if they were but properly managed. You must study their characters carefully, and gently induce them to give up bad habits and adopt good ones; you must be patient, thoughtful, and meek-spirited yourself. And mind! I won’t allow the least severity—they are never to be punished, or even scolded; you must govern them by—by—let me see! what is it? I read all about it in a very clever book on Education only a week ago! Ah! I know! you are to control them, and train them to habits of virtue entirely by *moral suasion*!”

Clarissa made no reply. She felt that the labours of Sisyphus, and the fruitless toil of the Danaides, were to be repeated by herself. However, she must do her best, and it would all come to an end some day. The clamour of the children and the petty jealousies of the nurses would be very hard to bear, but it did not matter much; trouble she must have, she supposed misery even, and one kind was just as good or as bad as another. It was in a stoical, rather than a Christian spirit, that Clarissa entered on her new appointment. It was apathy rather than resignation that reconciled her to her dreary lot, and naturally she was profoundly wretched, more wretched than she suspected herself of being. She began to doubt her Christianity, and she soon came to the sad conclusion that she

had deceived herself;—it was Susan in whom she had trusted, not in God; she had worshipped idols, and now they had vanished from her sight. "And how can it be that God is *love*?" she bitterly asked herself, as, tired to exhaustion by the long day's ungenial, unthankful labours, she flung herself, without undressing, on her bed. "If God loved me, would He punish me continually? would He thus pursue me with misfortune?" was her train of thought. "Why was my father taken from me, just as I had learned to love him, oh, so dearly? Why should Susan, my true and precious friend, my more than sister, have been snatched away before I comprehended the full value of her pure and deep affection? Why should either of them—nay, more, why should *both* have died, without being permitted to do for me what they wished? It seems as if some relentless fate incessantly pursued me, and took from me everything I loved and cared for, everything that made my life endurable! If God was love, He would not so afflict me; He would have pity on me; He would grant me some little happiness. If I might enjoy only a dead level of calm content, I would ask no more. I would not even long for *bliss*. Oh, the cold, grey, gloomy twilight of a life like mine! Better, far better, the darkness and silence of the grave."

And day after day wore on, with little variety. The children were worse even than she had anticipated, and the nurses—vulgar and spiteful women—omitted no opportunity of evincing their aversion and contempt. *Nominally*, Lady Clarissa was at the head of the nursery establishment—that is to say, she was responsible for everybody's faults, and answerable for all the mistakes and *contretemps* that will occur even in well-regulated homes, and that abound in families where there is no rule, no principle, but only caprice and selfishness, as guiding powers. The nurses—and, all things considered, they were not so very much to be blamed—looked upon her as an intruder and a spy; and they treated her with all the covert disrespect, and all the open intolerance, of irreligious ignorance. Secretly, they endeavoured to traverse her plans; they encouraged the children to revolt; they laughed at her as a titled beggar—a menial, "no better

than themselves!" Even at the best, their coarse familiarity repelled and disgusted her. If she had become as one of themselves, if she had been content to connive at sundry malpractices, they might perhaps have tolerated her, and treated her as they treated each other—that is, as sworn friends and allies one day, as rivals and enemies to-morrow.

She had but little to do with the young Earl, for he spent most of his time with his *soi-disant* tutor, Mr. Chatters, and they kept pretty much to their own apartments, which, to Clarissa's great grief, were those which had been, ever since she could remember, sacred to her father. But what little she had to do with him was painful in the extreme; for her brother absolutely refused to obey her smallest commands, even when couched in the form of kind requests. He set her at defiance continually, mocked at her, abused her, called her names that she shuddered to hear, and generally ended by taunting her with being a miserable beggar "living on *his* bounty." On occasion he would resort to violence, and many were the blows and pinches poor Clarissa received from one and another of her impracticable charges. If she ventured to complain to the Countess, the answer was:—"All your own fault, you don't manage them properly. If you did not exasperate them, they would not torment you. I dare say it's just *tut tut*! You should set them a better example."

And then her ladyship would inform her "sweet lambs" that Clarissa had been accusing them of this or that naughtiness, and giving "such a shocking account of their behaviour!" To which the lambs would generally reply "that she was a nasty, spiteful thing! that they couldn't bear her—that she told lies!" &c., &c. And their foolish mother listened and consoled, and laughed at what she called their cleverness, when they played tricks on their "governess," and encouraged them, in manner, if not in actual words, to "pay her out" for her imputed bad temper and her stupid ways. "Ah! you are naughty, mischievous rogues!" she would say, shaking her head good-humouredly, at the end of some recital or tirade,—"good-for-nothing children! and you really must not be so rough; though I dare say Clarissa is enough to pro-

voke a stone. The very sight of her turns my bile, I know!"

Then, as a matter of course, Clarissa reaped the natural fruit of this cruel and senseless partizanship, and the children ran back to the nursery, or to the schoolroom, to shout at her "*tell-tale-tit!*" and threaten that her tongue should be slit, with the rest of that antiquated, vulgar dog-grel which, let us hope, was peculiar to the generations of the past, when boys and girls really knew no better! At last she learned to refrain her lips, and never spoke of their misdeeds to the foolish, misguided mother.

Once, and once only, Clarissa, driven almost to distraction by Lord Orwell, was rash enough to appeal to Chatters. "The governess" had ventured to interfere in a fray between the Earl and his brother, the Honourable Sidney John—the eldest of her charges—Augustus being pronounced too old for the nursery. Sidney John had offended Lord Orwell, who at once inflicted such reprisals as seemed best to himself; and he pummelled the unlucky little fellow till he howled for mercy, and piteously besought Clarissa to hasten to his relief. Already the child's lip was bleeding, and he was trembling under the blows inflicted; and she must have interfered, even had not her womanly instincts led her to protect the younger and the weaker boy. Lord Orwell, whose passion was at its height, turned suddenly and savagely upon her, and showered blows upon her shoulders and arms—he could not reach her head—till she reeled and fell, cutting her forehead against an angle of the wainscot. Sidney, under cover of the new encounter, made good his retreat, and the Earl, having exhausted his rage, went to make his boast to his mother of how he had "licked that impudent, nasty Clarissa!"

Left alone, Clarissa was holding her handkerchief to her head, and trying to regain composure, when Mr. Chatters entered, and inquired, "What was the row?" Utterly unnerved, and driven beyond all bounds, the poor girl poured out her complaint, and implored him to keep Lord Orwell away from the other children; at any rate, to prevent such combats as that which had just taken place, and to which she was utterly unequal.

Chatters, who was really sorry for her, replied in a sympathising tone, and promised that he would do all he could to hinder his charming pupil from committing assaults upon his juniors, and from the possible chance of *fratricide*!

"In fact," continued Chatters, "Lord Orwell is a little brute—more like a young butcher and prize-fighter than a peer of the realm—and he'll come to a bad end one of these fine days! But as for complaining, it's of no use; when he serves me out I shrug my shoulders and say nothing, though it is not often he gives *me* a specimen of his amiable peculiarities. I *manage* him, you see."

"And how *do* you manage him?" asked Clarissa; "I should like to know your secret, for they baffle me, every one of those dreadful children."

"It's easy enough! I never contradict him, I humour him, I fool him to the top of his bent; I am always of his opinion. If he wants to cheat his lady-mother, I let him. When it's convenient I close my eyes and shut my ears; in short, I allow him to have his own way in everything, and I flatter his childish weaknesses, and treat him as the *Earl*, and monarch of all he surveys!"

"I could not do that," she said coldly, and withdrawing, for Chatters, as he concluded his fine speech, tried to take her hand, at the same time putting on his most insinuating expression. But from that day he always addressed her, whenever opportunity afforded, and made a show of being in her confidence, and in some inexplicable way gave her to understand that former barriers no longer existed between them.

One dull evening, in the dreary autumn twilight, she stole away into the park. It had been a dreadful day. The children had been more outrageous than usual, the nurses, "her fellow-servants," as she now told herself they were, more indolent than ever. She had one of her bad, nervous headaches, and she had eaten nothing since a scanty and interrupted breakfast. The Countess was dining, her two elder boys with her; the other children were asleep or happily occupied. Clarissa put on her cloak and hood, and went down to the mere, hoping that the air and the silence might relieve her pain.

All was still there; only the water rippled among the sedges, and the tall reeds rustled in the chill evening breeze. The twilight was rapidly closing in. There had been a week's rain, and the lake was very high, almost up to Clarissa's feet as she sat down upon a little jutting rock, which in old times had been one of her favourite resorts. She looked down. How still, and deep, and cold the water seemed! She had never seen it so deep at that spot, though it was never very shallow at any time. Suppose she *slipped*! It would not matter, no one would care, and she—her troubles would be over, her head would throb, her heart would ache, no more! "God has deserted me," she said mournfully, as she shivered in the blast, though her head and hands were burning. "Why should I live on, desolate and forsaken? If—if——!"

Just then came across her mind, like a strain of half-forgotten, familiar music, the words, "Be still, and know that I am God;" and again, "Commit thy way unto the Lord." At that moment she thought she heard a sound behind her; she turned, and there was Chatters, and she knew at once that he had watched and followed her. She was far from the house, and it was getting very dusk. Not even a keeper was likely to pass that way.

Chatters came on, and advanced to her side with an air of easy familiarity. He came so close to her that she involuntarily retreated.

"Hallo!" cried he; "take care! you'll tumble off the rock!"

It was too late; even as he spoke Clarissa's foot touched the slippery edge, and the next moment she had disappeared from his view, covered by the deep, cold waters of the mere.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WHAT WAS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF FATE.

"What if I died? The world is over full;
Stronger and better souls would come instead.
Is there no place in heaven yet for me?
Must I keep on, with feigned martial tread?
Live to fear death, and count my sorrow sin?
God knows."

It was fortunate for Clarissa that Chatters was a first-rate swimmer, and that he could dive almost as swiftly as a fish. No sooner had she disappeared than he was after her, and she would have had a regular ducking and nothing worse, had not an under-current caught her and swept her farther from the shore into the deepest portion of the mere; and as it was nearly dark, there was more than a chance that the young man might not quickly find her. It was, indeed, several minutes before he succeeded in getting firm hold of her, and she was quite insensible when at last he brought her on to *terra firma*, and then it was some distance to the house. She was a very light burden, however, so he got over the ground more easily than he had ventured to anticipate, and carried her into the great hall, where there was a bell used for summoning such domestics as were not, but ought to be, in attendance. He rang such a peal as sounded through all the passages and corridors, and brought, not only half-a-dozen startled servants, but the Countess herself, who hurried down from her boudoir to ascertain the cause of so unwonted a disturbance. She had been slightly nervous ever since Susan's death, and any sudden alarm filled her with vaguest apprehensions. She was on the spot almost as soon as her people, and close behind her followed the new house-steward, who had been transacting business with her ladyship, when the clanging bell broke up the conference.

"Good gracious me!" she screamed, falling naturally

into the expletives of her youth. "Why, Chatters, what have you there? As I live, it's Clarissa! She's been and gone and drowned herself just to spite us all!"

"Not quite so bad," replied Chatters, who was not in any condition to give an account of his adventure, for his teeth were going in accordance with his name, and his strength was pretty well exhausted. The Countess gazed on the motionless, dripping form that the young man laid down, just where the light of the clustered lamps fell full upon its death-like face, and the servants stared and faintly exclaimed at a respectful distance. No one appeared to think of succouring the unfortunate girl till Mr. Thompson, who seemed to be the only person present in full possession of his senses, interposed, and asked the assembled concourse what the —— they meant by letting the young lady lie there in her wet clothes, as if they all wanted to make sure of a "'crowner's inquest"?

Coralie was the first who responded to the emphatic though inelegant appeal, and she desired the housemaids present to carry Lady Clarissa to her room, while she commanded hot water, blankets, brandy, and all that could possibly be needed, to be brought without delay. And at the same instant Mr. Thompson once more despatched a messenger to Dr. Hammond, who, it might be presumed, was growing quite accustomed to these imperative demands upon his time and skill. Chatters was escaping to his own quarters when Lady Orwell stopped him. "How did it happen, Chatters? I can't have you go till you have told me."

"Lady Clarissa was standing on the little promontory, and I suppose her foot slipped," replied the young man, who shook as if in a fit of ague. Then he essayed to pass on, but again the Countess interposed. "You are sure she isn't *dead*?"

"No, your ladyship, I cannot be sure; I should think, however, she will come to if properly treated. She was not in the water more than three minutes at the outside; but it took me a good while to carry her to the Castle—and she did not seem to breathe. If your ladyship will be so kind as to excuse me, I will go and change my clothes."

And as Chatters spoke he gave himself a good shake, much after the fashion of a water-dog just landed, and this simple action proved more eloquent than his words, for he scattered so much moisture around him that Lady Orwell fell back immediately, and in very sharp accents desired him to go at once and make himself fit for human society. Nothing loth, Mr. Chatters obeyed, and having gained his own apartment, wisely resolved not to leave it again that night. He would have a good warm by the fire, a good supper, an extra allowance of hot grog, and go to bed.

By the time Dr. Hammond appeared Clarissa had, as Coralie expressed it, "come to life again." But she seemed scarcely conscious, her heart beat very feebly, and her breathing was faint and irregular. Several hours had elapsed before Dr. Hammond would declare her out of danger, and he stayed with her till the morning, only leaving her to visit Mr. Chatters, partly to give the youth the benefit of his advice, and partly to discover how it came to pass that Lady Clarissa had been in the water at all. He found the tutor very comfortably ensconced in an easy-chair before a roaring fire. He was wrapped in rugs and blankets, the *débris* of a sumptuous supper was on a table beside him, a short pipe, with glowing bowl, was between his lips, and in his hand was a large tumbler full of some steaming alcoholic beverage. Clearly Mr. Chatters was taking care of himself, nor did he seem any the worse for his impromptu plunge-bath.

"I think you folks at the Castle have determined to harry my life out of me," said the Doctor, almost irritably. "You can't pass a month without a catastrophe of some sort. For years I never came here on any more important occasion than measles, or inflammatory cold, or rheumatics, or another youngster come to town; and now I am continually being startled out of my wits by breathless messengers, who incoherently tell me that there's a case of life and death, and I must not stop to put my boots on. I had only just dined, and settled down for the evening, when in rushes a frantic page, to inform me that Lady Clarissa is drowned, and Mr. Chatters—'all but!' Pray, how did you both get into the water?"

"I didn't push her in," said the young man, sullenly, puffing away vigorously; "she slipped."

"I never supposed you did push her in. If I thought such a thing, I would see you off to Ipsley Gaol, whether you had finished your smoke or not. When I was a young man, I laid my pipe aside on being addressed by my superiors."

"Ah!" rejoined Chatters, with a visible sneer, "those were fine times when you were young, Doctor; but it must have been considerably more than half-a-century ago, I should imagine. And I am much obliged to you for your kind assurances. If I ever do chance to commit a murder, I'll be sure and let you know."

"Don't be a fool," replied the Doctor, angrily. At the best he disliked Chatters exceedingly, and now that the fellow was really impudent he had some difficulty in restraining his naturally fiery temper. "I'll tell you what, young man, civility does not cost much, but the lack of it sometimes causes serious inconvenience——"

"To the person who expects it in vain! 'Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall not be disappointed.'"

"No! to the person who withholds it, sir! Did you ever hear, as you seem to be fond of old saws, that 'manners make the man, and the want of them the monkey'?"

"I believe I have! it's a proverb I always endeavour to impress upon my '*superiors*' when they unfortunately forget themselves. If you are quite convinced that I did not push Lady Clarissa into the mere, Dr. Hammond, and if there is no other point on which you are especially curious to-night, perhaps you will allow me to smoke my pipe in peace, and permit me to go to bed. I am not your patient, I am glad to say!"

"Mr. Chatters, I don't want to quarrel with you, and I will not keep you from your repose if you will only tell me how it was that Lady Clarissa happened to slip into the water. How came she to be there at all, so late in the evening?"

Chatters smiled a curious smile, which angered the Doctor, though he by no means understood it. "Really,

Doctor, you are so very inquisitive!" he replied, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "Young people *do* take sentimental strolls in the twilight, you know! And if two young people are of the same mind, and go out about the same time, it is not so *very* unaccountable if they find themselves in each other's company—eh? But perhaps the young men and maidens were more discreet in your day? Nobody ever sang, 'Gin a body meet a body,' or anything half so improper?"

"Do you mean to dare to imply that Lady Clarissa Oakleigh met *you—you*—by appointment?"

"That's a leading question, to which I object, and I don't see what right you have to ask it. That's Lady Clarissa's affair and mine, and no one else's."

Now Dr. Hammond longed with all his heart to give this jackanapes a good shaking; and he could easily have done it, though it was, as Chatters had politely suggested, a great many years since he was young. But he restrained himself, feeling that it really was no business of his, and that he would not serve poor Clarissa by making any kind of disturbance. But that she really had intended to meet Chatters, he did not for an instant believe; though it was not at all improbable, he thought, that Chatters had gone out, intending to waylay her, or perhaps followed her, step by step, from the Castle to the mere. He went away little wiser for the interview, but more than ever convinced that Clarissa's position was about as miserable as it could be. "It might have been better for her, perhaps, if that fellow had not fished her out of the lake," he muttered to himself, as he walked slowly from Chatters' chamber towards that of his patient. "If he has saved her life—and I suppose he has—he'll found a claim on that; and he is quite impudent enough to persecute her with addresses, which will go far to make her home-life untenable. And I do believe he would have my lady's countenance. She would rejoice at the prospect of a *mésalliance* for her unloved step-daughter."

But, for a while, Clarissa was sheltered alike from Chatters' unwelcome familiarities, from the Countess's reproaches, and from all the troubles of the nursery. Instead of rallying in a few hours, she became extremely ill:

restlessness and delirium soon supervened, and she just escaped all the dangers and agonies of rheumatic fever. Happily, nearly all her wild talk was in French, and no one but Coralie had any idea that she actually had for the moment entertained the idea of self-destruction. Frivolous, saucy, and vain was Mademoiselle Coralie, and sadly wanting in integrity, but she had a woman's heart in her breast, and out of very pity she kept Clarissa's secret, and did all she could to soothe and comfort her, in her weary, almost ceaseless ramblings. Perhaps it was the sound of the language, which was so familiar to her, or perhaps it was the tone of unaffected kindness in which Mademoiselle spoke, but certainly she was the only person who seemed to have the slightest influence over the invalid, and it was she who had to administer the medicines and apply the remedies which the case demanded. "*Pauvre enfant!*" she said, one evening when she had been listening to Clarissa's feeble but piteous plaint; "*pauvre enfant!* but that thou art unhappy, in that thou hast not one friend to appear for thee, or do thee one good turn. Me—I can do nothing! I may not even show thee too much kindness, or I shall come to grief myself. No one must be the friend of the *pauvre Clarisse*; but I will never again—no, never—be rude and disrespectful, *ma chère miladi*; and if it so chance that I can make good for thee, and protect thee from the evil—in verity, I will! And may the Blessed Virgin aid me to keep my firm resolve, and show me how to defeat the machinations of this poor child's cruel enemies!"

It was October when they laid Clarissa in that bed, where she tossed about for so many weary days and nights; it was near upon Christmas when she left her room and began once more to mingle with ordinary life. Her illness had altered her considerably. She had grown, at least, a couple of inches, or so Coralie averred; her sallow, swarthy complexion had become comparatively clear, and her lustrous dark eyes were sadder and softer than ever. No one now could call Clarissa *plain*! She would never be a beauty—except, perhaps, to those who dearly loved her, if any such there might be in the unknown days to come; but she was "fair to see," and without any

question the fairest and sweetest and most gracious lady within the sound of the pleasant Orwell bells. The Countess saw the improvement, and liked her none the better; indeed, she muttered to herself that "the girl was more of an aristocrat than before." Why could she not be—well! like her own children, who were certainly not so handsome as they might have been, considering their mother's pretensions to good looks? But she could forgive her, even for actual prettiness, if she were not, at the merest glance, such a veritable patrician. Of this involuntary sin poor Clarissa herself was, of course, unconscious; but she perceived that her stepmother's aversion was rather increased than diminished, and that her efforts to please were more fruitless than before her illness.

By degrees, she resumed her regular duties with the children, and things returned very much to their accustomed routine; but there was one change—Chatters was no longer an inmate of the castle. He was only absent for a while, she casually heard; he was coming back again; but for the present he was gone, and she rejoiced to know that she was freed from the annoyance of his companionship. One day, however, she was considerably startled, not to say stunned, at certain information which she received. The Countess had sent for her, to give her some necessary orders respecting the little girls under her care, and, having issued her commands, her ladyship said, abruptly, "I am writing to Chatters; have you any message to send him?"

"Thank you—no!" replied Clarissa, with a sudden haughtiness she could not repress; and as she knitted her delicate brows, and wreathed her slender neck, she looked so thoroughly well-born and so high-bred, that the Countess could have beaten her on the spot. Never mind! she had a rod in store for the supercilious girl! Concealing her displeasure, she turned from her writing-desk, to say, smilingly, "Do you know, Clarissa, you are very unkind to that poor young man? What has he done that you should treat him with such disdain?"

"I do not wish to be disdainful," replied Clarissa, guardedly, for she did not like the affectation of amiability

assumed by Lady Orwell. She had experienced it before, and it always boded mischief. "But," she continued, "Chatters' manners are not pleasing to me, and I had rather avoid his society—that is all. Besides, he and I can have nothing in common."

"Clarissa, I did not think you were such a thorough coquette."

"I really do not understand your ladyship. There is no one here with whom I *could* coquette, even if I could condescend to act so bad a part."

"No; I know there is no one *at present*—*at present*, my dear. Your lover is a hundred miles away, as we are all well aware; but there are various modes of playing the coquette, you know."

"*My lover*, madam!" exclaimed Clarissa, her cheeks burning with a sudden glow, and her eyes flashing with all the pride of her father's proud patrician race. "You do not mean—you cannot intend—to intimate that Chatters has presumed—has dared——"

"Tut! tut!" cried her ladyship, with her loudest, shrillest laugh. "Fine heroics! and they might go down, if one did not know a secret or two. So you repent of your little intrigue—is that it? You need not; I shall make allowances for you. Young people will be young people, and they will fall in love as long as the world goes round. So don't pretend, because it is quite unnecessary."

"Again I repeat I have not the most distant idea to what your ladyship alludes. A secret? There was none—there is none—to know. An intrigue? I must beg, madam, that you will speak more plainly."

"I will be as plain as you like; only, remembering the days when I was young myself, I wanted to spare your blushes. Perhaps I go too far in calling the matter 'an intrigue.' The word alarms you. What shall I say, then?—a clandestine love-affair?"

"You can say what you choose, for it cannot at all concern me. I have no love-affair, clandestine or declared—how should I have? I have seen no one. I am too young."

"You are almost seventeen, at which age many girls are married. But that is neither here nor there. Have

you the conscience to tell me that you are not privately engaged to Chatters?"

"Your ladyship must be dreaming, or I must. You might as well ask me if I were engaged to one of your grooms or lacqueys!"

"Come, now, that is too bad. Chatters is really a gentleman."

"I never guessed it."

"And he will soon be a clergyman."

"You surprise me more and more."

"Did you not know he was at college? A mere form, just to pass one or two needful examinations. He wished to take holy orders—a man with some kind of handle to his name always gets on better in society. Either as secretary, or tutor, or what not, he will command a higher salary than if he were plain Alfred Chatters; also, he will be able to undertake clerical duty. There are some very desirable chaplaincies to be obtained through the proper channels. Oh! he will succeed in life, you need not be afraid."

"As he is a fellow-creature, I hope he will succeed, provided, however, he seeks honourable means of success; but, on any other grounds, I cannot pretend to be at all interested in Mr. Chatters' career. Your ladyship must know that he has always, by reason of his too free and presuming ways, been my aversion."

"I have heard say that it's best to begin with a little aversion. But come, now, Clarissa, I shall lose my patience; if I were not in a most angelic frame of mind this morning, I should have lost it long ago. Don't be too perverse; you may as well own your engagement."

"I cannot own what does not—what never can—exist. Oh! why am I to be so cruelly insulted?"

"Insulted! what next? You are just like Lydia Languish in that delightful play, who wept because her guardians put up the banns for her at the parish church that she might openly marry the man of her affections, when she had already arranged to *elope* to Gretna Green! I remember that she said, almost choked with tears of vexation—'To think that I should live to be asked in church! to think that I should ever be called a *spinster*!'"

or something just like it. But I thought you had more sense, Clarissa. The long and the short of it is, I don't want you to elope. I want you to behave respectably, as my late dear lord's daughter should behave; so you will understand that I don't withhold my consent. You and Chatters may marry as soon as you like after his ordination, and, if you are a good girl, I'll give you a handsome wedding outfit, and a purse full of sovereigns into the bargain. Perhaps I'll give you a hundred pounds; but I won't promise it."

"Your ladyship is very generous; but no wedding outfit, no present, will be required. Oh! why will you not believe me? Not only is there no understanding between myself and that most obnoxious person, but he has never dared to say one word which could be construed into a declaration of regard. He knew his place too well for that, I imagine."

"Clarissa, can you say—can you *dare* to say and look me in the face—that you and Chatters did not meet evening after evening by appointment, that you did not so meet him on that particular evening when you so mysteriously fell into the water?"

"I can! I always dare to speak the truth. I look in your face, and distinctly affirm that I never even conceived the idea of an appointment with that person. I never met him by accident. *Once* he followed me, and overtook me at the Mere-side on the promontory. He came so close to me that I retreated, forgetting that I was already on the edge of the rock, and my foot slipped."

"Chatters has confessed that you were in the habit of meeting him in the dusk all through last autumn."

"Chatters is a *liar*, and a very base liar."

"Oh fie, fie! you were seen by others."

"Let them come forward. No one ever saw Chatters and myself in conversation—in company together—out of doors. Well, if you will not believe me, it does not matter; it is vain to multiply words; only once more I declare, as in God's holy presence, that I am entirely innocent of this shameful crime of which I am accused."

"I never called it a crime—the worst I should say of it is, that it was an imprudence, and not quite worthy of the

daughter of a British nobleman. There is no crime in honest love that is to end in marriage."

"No modest girl would act as you say I have acted. I should never again dare to call myself Clarissa Oakleigh if I had once—only once—condescended to such unmaidenly behaviour. I call such conduct criminal, if you do not."

"Very well! But you make all this fine oration in vain; it does not tell upon *me*! If you persist in your most unnecessary falsehood, there is no more to be said—only, take notice: I shall not permit you to play fast and loose in this way, and, whatever you may think, you won't throw Chatters over for a mere girlish caprice; you shall marry him as soon as he is ordained."

"That I never will! I will be torn by wild horses first."

"Pooh! pooh! you might as well say you would be eaten by tigers and boa-constrictors! You won't even be beaten and shut up on a bread-and-water diet! But—mark my words, Clarissa Oakleigh!—*it is written in the Book of Fate that Alfred Chatters is to be your husband!*"

"I think not," said Clarissa, calmly. "With your permission, I will withdraw."

"You can go, but depend upon it you will marry Chatters. I shall be only too thankful to have you off my hands, and safely married to an exceedingly worthy and respectable young man, who is far more devoted to a proud, foolish minx than she deserves. Besides, he *saved your life!*"

"Would to God that he had not! Oh, that I had died that night!" wailed Clarissa, when she found herself alone. "What is my life worth to me? God has forsaken me; man has forsaken me, and I am given over into the hands of my cruel foes. And yet, *no!* I will not say that I am forsaken of God! I *will* hope! I *will* trust in Him! Surely, at last, He will appear for my relief, and bring me out of this deep pit of misery! Out of the depths I will still cry unto Him—I will say, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God!'"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE RENEWAL OF HOPE.

"Wish not, dear friends, my pain away,
 Wish me a wise and thankful heart,
 With God in all my griefs to stay,
 Nor from His loved correction start.

"Never so safe as when our will
 Yields undiscerned by all but God."

THE winter had passed away, and it was spring again—spring in its earliest, freshest vernal beauty. The snow-drops had withered, but the pale primrose-stars were gleaming among the "shadowy grass;" the daisies, "vermeil-rimmed and white," were scattered up and down the meads, the violets nestled once more under the budding hedgerows, and the delicate wood-anemone drooped its purple-veined bells among the crinkled cowslip leaves and the springing arums. It was spring once more; but it brought little pleasure to the sad, heavy-hearted Clarissa Oakleigh.

The Countess did not resume the extraordinary conversation which had so perplexed and alarmed her step-daughter, but Clarissa soon discovered that this pretended engagement of hers was by no means a secret in the household. The nurses smirked and glanced at her when Chatters' name was mentioned. Louisa Maria, prompted of course by some older person, begged that she might be first bridesmaid; while Orwell, with horrible precocity, joked her continually on the subject. One day a blessed event happened; the Countess and all her brood, except the baby—now two years old—went off betimes in the morning, for what her ladyship called "a good spell of shopping" at Ipsley. As the journey was a long one, and the evenings still closed in early, it was more than probable that they would remain all night at the hotel. Thus Clarissa had a full twenty-four hours at her own

disposal, for the baby refused to go to anyone except her regular attendant, the present grand head-nurse, Mrs. Cray, *vice* Mrs. Morris, cashiered for dishonest practices and cruelty to human animals. To the last moment Clarissa dared not believe that she really was to be left at home; she was so afraid lest the Countess should suddenly say, "After all, Clarissa, I think the elder children will want you, so you had better prepare to accompany us." But, for some reason, her services were not required; and at last, though scarcely able to credit her good fortune, she saw the whole noisy troop packed into the great family carriage, while Mr. Thompson sat beside the coachman, and two nurses filled the rumble. Finally they drove off, Orwell shouting out, at the final moment, to Clarissa, "I say, Clary, give my love to Chatters! Of course you'll be writing to him while we are away!" She turned indignantly aside, but not before she had caught the sly look of more than one of the vastly-amused domestics. At least six or eight persons heard this charming speech of the young lord.

She hurried to the old schoolroom, which was still, by courtesy, supposed to be her studio, for her easels and paints were there, as well as her books and finished pictures, and such properties as she could safely call her own. Her first impulse was to sit down and cry with utter vexation. Never before had her name and Chatters' been thus publicly connected. It filled her with a mortification too intense for words, especially as she perceived that it was taken on all hands as a matter of course—*une affaire arrangée*, as Madame Pierrot would have said. But a few minutes' cool reflection determined her not to yield to her annoyance. "I will not let that insolent boy spoil my holiday," she said to herself; "it may be months before I have another, and I will, as far as I can, enjoy myself. What shall I do with my day—my precious day that is all my own? I will try to paint a little, if my right hand has not lost its cunning for want of practice; then I will have an early dinner, after which I will take one of my favourite books and go off into the woods, and I have a great mind to go and drink tea at the Woodland Lodge; dear old Sweetie would be so delighted! But that reminds

me,—first and foremost, before I touch my paints and brushes, I will pay my old nurse a visit; she has not been out of her own room since the winter, Coralie tells me.”

Upon this idea Clarissa immediately acted, and great was the old woman's delight to behold her nursling, whom she seldom saw in those sad days. She was not nearly as old as Mrs. Sweetapple, who, in spite of her feebleness and many infirmities, still lingered; but she had had a severe attack of *pneumonia* early in the winter, from which she did not rally, and she had become weak in mind as well as in body, her memory failing her, and a certain childish peevishness showing itself at intervals.

“Bless you, dearie, bless you!” said nurse, when Clarissa had explained how she came to be at liberty. “The very sight of you does my eyes good. And are they *all* gone?”

“All! except baby and Nurse Cray. I believe baby would have gone, too, only she has been so very fractious with her teeth of late.”

“The Lord be thanked, my dear! for it *is* a real blessing to be delivered from those rough children. Now sit you down, my lady, and talk to me; sit close, for I am getting as deaf as a post. And are you feeling quite strong again?”

“Quite, I think, nurse.” But Clarissa spoke wearily, and there was a melancholy cadence in her voice.

Nurse noticed it. “What is it ails my pet?” she asked, drawing the girl's soft, slender fingers into her own trembling, wrinkled hand.

“Nothing fresh, nurse, only I am so tired of my life. It is all so dreary, so cold, so hopeless. When I awake in the morning, I wish it were evening; and when night comes, I wish I could lie down, and sleep without awaking.”

“Ay, my dearie, it's hard; I know it's hard! But you must be patient. You must bide *His* time, my lady. He'll do what is best for you, though things do look dark, and without much promise for the future. He'll open the way for you, trust me, when He sees fit. He was a good many years sending you a friend, you know, dearie, but she came at last—and *such a friend!*”

"Yes, such a friend! But that she was so precious makes her loss the more bitter. Nursie, everything has gone wrong with me since she died."

"Don't be down-hearted, my dear. I don't like to see you give way; you had always such a spirit when you were a child; you would 'never say die,' not you, Lady Clarissa!"

"Ah, but the spirit has been crushed out of me since my father died. You cannot think what life in that nursery is. And there seems to be no way of mending matters. Those children do not know what love and gentleness mean, and as for the 'moral suasion' their mother insists on, you might as well try to reason with the winds. I suppose it is all for my good—all *discipline*; but I feel that I cannot endure it much longer."

"'Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.' The Book says that, you know, dearie."

"Nurse, my greatest trouble is, that I have lost my rest. My heart has grown cold towards God; my faith and hope are so feeble that I think sometimes they must be dead. Day by day I feel myself hardening; the gloom grows deeper, and I cannot pray."

"My poor child! You are not the first that has sunk in these deep waters, and felt too hopeless to cry for help. Dearie, I'll tell you something. I am a foolish old woman, and at times I think I am getting silly, but one thing keeps clear as ever to me, and that, Lady Clarissa, is the dear Lord's faithfulness. He don't forget us when we forget Him; when we, like naughty, wayward children, loose His hand, He doesn't let us go; though we don't—and all *our* fault—we don't feel the comfort of His clasp. But He loves us all the same, and waits till we want Him sorely, till we are quite empty of earthly joys, it may be, and then—*then*, dearie—when we turn to Him and cry to Him, He pities the silly, wandering child, and takes him to His bosom and comforts him, and bids him be of good cheer, for all shall yet be well. But it is a sore grief when we can neither see our Father's face, nor feel His hand.

It is sometimes said God hides His face, but I think that is the wrong way of putting it; it is we who set up a screen so that we cannot see God—a screen of sin and self-will, like the clouds that hide the sun. The sun does not go out of his course, and get behind the clouds, but the clouds come sailing before the sun, who shines on behind them just the same. Lady Clarissa, don't doubt God; doubt all else, but never *doubt Him*, if you don't want to go mad with wretchedness and despair."

"I am so weary, nurse, and my heart has turned to ice."

"The Sun of Righteousness can melt it."

"Oh, that He would! I would give my life—though that is not saying much—to be at peace again; to be able to cry, with rapture, 'My God, my Father, and my Friend!' Nurse, I am that miserable creature, a backslider—for *I did* love God and His Christ; *I did* yearn for the joy that is in Him alone; *I did* desire from my inmost heart to serve Him, and do His work, and wait His will—and *now*——"

"Don't call yourself bad names, dearie; that won't help you. Just leave yourself, and trust to *Him*. Never say, '*I did*,' but say, '*I do*! *I do*! and, by His grace, *I will*.' You won't perish, though it may seem as if it came very near to it. God is in the deeps of the sea of sorrow; nay, He is in the hell that we sink into sometimes through our own foolishness and wickedness, just as much as He is on Mount Pisgah. He was in the thunders of Sinai, as well as in the glory of the Transfiguration mountain. It will come all right, my dear; only trust Him. Keep feeling after Him through the black darkness, for *He is there*! He is, indeed, Lady Clarissa, for I have found Him there many and many a time; and while you are feeling and groping for His hand, and crying, 'O Lord, take hold of me, and lead me whither Thou wouldest I should go,' all of a sudden you will feel the clasp you know so well, and, as you cling to it, the light will shine, and you will see your Father's face and meet His smile! And then—then, dearie, all the shadows will flee away, and it will be morning with you—such a morning of joy as you have never known."

"Nurse, I did not know you felt like that."

"And once I did not feel so, Lady Clarissa. Once I muddled myself with all sorts of doctrines, till, I think, Christ just taught me, and I saw and felt my Father's love and goodness. Ah! I have been in the deeps myself, and I know what it is to cry, 'Lord, save me, or I perish!'"

"I feel so much brighter for talking to you. I think you have done me good, dear old nurse."

"I hope so, child; if I have, I am glad. But it is not me, it is the Lord, that tells me how to comfort you. God makes use of very humble and ignorant people sometimes."

"I think you are very far from ignorant, for you know the best things. Oh! I feel as if better times would come. Indeed, they are come, if only I can pray, as I used to, and I think I can. I can say, 'Lord, lift *Thou* up the light of Thy countenance upon me, and give me peace!'—peace in Him, you know, though all the rest be struggle and disappointment still."

"My dear, may I ask you a question? I have heard something about you that troubles me."

"Ask it, nurse; I think I guess what it is."

"They tell me you are going to be married."

"It is not true; I have never even thought of marriage. Why, I am barely seventeen!"

"Girls of seventeen do think of marriage, my dear, and it is only natural, I suppose, that they should; but it's a great pity to rush into matrimony too soon; buds can't be buds again, once they have turned into flowers. However, that's naught to do with it. They did say—I never can have dreamt such a piece of madness!—that you and that young Chatters were sweethearts!"

"*You* will believe me, nurse, when I tell you that there is no foundation for such a report. I excessively dislike Mr. Chatters, all the more because he has tried to treat me with a familiarity that is unbecoming in every point of view. He is a very vulgar young man, and, what is worse, a most unprincipled person. If he were my equal, I should still be repelled by him; being, as he is, altogether my inferior, I am not only repelled, but indignant and disgusted."

"Has he presumed to speak of love to the Earl's daughter?"

"Not a word. He has scarcely had an opportunity. But the Countess tells me that he declares—oh! all sorts of rubbish; and she affects to believe that there is a clandestine understanding between us. As if a daughter of our house could so far forget herself!"

"My mind is quite at rest on that score, my dear; but, oh! don't let them drive you, or worry you, into anything."

"Don't be afraid, nurse. I will suffer death—ay, and what is worse than death, loss of character!—rather than I will be that young man's wife. I think, if I do right, God will set that matter straight for me; for I have never provoked such a persecution."

"It's a plot, dear; you must be careful."

"I know that; I wish I knew how to act for the best."

"I can't advise you, my lady, or I would. Shut up in this room I only hear what I hear. I can't tell how things are going in the family. Ask the Lord to help you, to give you wisdom, to guide you. If you want human counsel—and it is through earthly friends that God most often helps us—I should say talk to Mrs. Sweetapple; she is to be trusted."

"I was thinking of going to see her this afternoon."

"You had better do it. She is more a woman of the world than I am, and she loves you, my lady, as the last of the old family she has served so long."

A little more talk, and then Clarissa went away, for old nurse began to be drowsy. She had brightened up wonderfully, but all the greater was the reaction when weakness again overpowered her. This conversation, however, had wonderfully strengthened Clarissa, and as she returned to the schoolroom she thanked God, who had given her an hour of consolation and refreshment. She tried her brushes for a little while, and looked over her favourite "studies." Would any of them ever be finished? She had not spent two hours at her easel since Christmas, and now it was April. She had not taken a sketch out of doors for a whole year. And she felt that her artist power was leaving her simply from lack of exercise.

After her early dinner she took a volume from the shelves, put on her hat and shawl, and went out into the sunshine. It was such a lovely day, and the woods were full of life; the sky was blue above the budding trees, and the birds sang joyous trills among the branches. There was a little gold-green beetle scudding over the olive-tinted moss; there was a bright-eyed mouse peeping from under the aromatic foliage of the clustering ground ivy; there was a silver-feathered ringdove cooing to its mate on a dark fir bough; there was the golden celandine carpeting the emerald sward all round a little pool, over which the tasselled willows hung; and there was the "rosy plumelet" of the larch, which, however, in those days, no laureate had sung.

Clarissa found one of her old seats under a great gnarled oak, and there she sat down intending to read; but her thoughts would not let her; everything she saw and heard about her reminded her of the days that were gone—"the days that were no more." But she did not think so hopelessly as in the morning; her heart was lighter, her spirit was stronger, the sullen despair had melted away into a quiet sense of her Heavenly Father's love and care; once again she could look for Him to appear as her Guide and Helper, and she could wait till He saw fit to make her way plain before her face. Ah! there is far deeper significance in that readiness *to wait* than many a one dreams of! To be patient, to bide one's time, leads generally to success in common worldly affairs. How much more, then, when the patient waiting is for something better than earth's best can give! Waiting God's will is sometimes sweeter than doing it; only that—

"Well waited is well done."

The shadows slanted far across the glade when Clarissa arose at last and took her way to the lodge where Mrs. Sweetapple had lived for the last few years with her married daughter and her family. The Countess had regularly harried her out of the Castle on pretence that she incited the under-servants to rebellion and discontent, and that she was always harping on the happy *régime* which, with her ladyship's advent, had passed away. But the

late Earl took due care of his faithful servant, and he placed her and her daughter—lately widowed—in one of the more secluded lodges in the park, and he bought for her an annuity, that she might, in her last days, lack nothing, nor be dependent even on nearest relatives. She hailed Clarissa's appearance with almost childish delight. She was now very infirm, and scarcely able to move from the cushioned arm-chair, which stood by the window in summer, and by the fire in winter, and where she read her Bible, and knitted, and dozed, and chatted, the whole year round. But her faculties were still clear, and her perceptions wonderfully keen; and the shrewdness which had characterised her more active days had by no means left her.

"Now, this is an unexpected honour, my lady dear," she said, when Clarissa took off her hat, and, presenting her with a nosegay of wild flowers, announced that she was come to tea. "Martha, put these flowers into the chaney vase, and set the table quick. And get out some of that fine honey; my young lady used to be very fond of honey. And there's that mulberry jam I was once so famous for! And there! we might have known you were coming, my lady, for we baked only this very morning, and made a lot of those nice cakes you used to relish when you were a little one. Didn't Tim bring in some water-cresses too?"

Such a tea it was, a right royal spread! There were dainties enough for twenty people, and Clarissa really enjoyed her bread and honey, and the rich purple mulberry jam, that made her think of the olden days when Nurse Barlow and Sweetie reigned supreme from the Castle's haunted attics to its lowest cellar. Sweetie was with difficulty induced to share the repast, but nothing could persuade Martha, herself an elderly woman, with a married son and daughters in service, to sit down at the same table with "my Lady Clarissa." To all entreaties she only replied, "No, no, my lady, indeed I couldn't; I know my place too well. I'll wait on you, and shall think myself much honoured."

And so it had to be; and when tea was over, and she was left alone with Sweetie, Clarissa told her all her trouble

about Chatters, and asked what she could do in this most unpleasant and cruel dilemma. Sweetie had heard the story as current in the servants'-hall, and she had been longing to see her young lady, and talk the matter over with her. "Not that I believed a word of it," she said, with quite a flush upon her aged cheeks. "I knew my lord's daughter too well for that; but says I to Martha, when she told me what her Patty had told her, they mean to make a match of it if they can, and they'll try to force my young lady into it *somehow*! They'll trap her with her own words, or they'll make her believe she has compromised her reputation, or something! I can see the Countess has made up her mind, and there never was but one that could hinder her from doing what she had set her mind upon, and he's gone. Ay, dearie me, to think that she should turn out such a termagant and plotter, though I saw from the first what she was; and to think that that fellow, that's only fit for the stables or the kennel, should dare to lift his eyes to such as my Lady Clarissa! But it is all her fault; he would never have presumed had he not been encouraged. I should say she put it into his head, my dear, and she means to egg him on and on till she gains her shameful ends! But she never must gain them, my lady dear."

"She never must and never shall, Sweetie. Don't be afraid. A girl cannot be *forced* to marry in this country, and no power on earth would make me say 'I will.' I suppose one might be dragged to church, but one could hold one's tongue, or, better still, say boldly, '*No, I never will.*' But I foresee terrible trouble."

"And so do I, my lady. It's a cruel and shameful persecution, and how to hinder it I am sure I can't tell while she has you in her power. Chatters is away now, that is one good thing."

"But he will return. He is coming back in June; at least, the children say so. He will resume his duties with Lord Orwell during the long vacation. And when he comes, oh! Sweetie, what *must* I do?"

"You must go away, my dear."

"How can I? She would not let me stir. And there is no Mr. Hadfield now to interfere on my behalf."

"You must go unbeknownst to her. You owe her no duty, and she has no real right over you. She gives you board and lodging, and makes you work for them; there is no reason why you should not work elsewhere."

"But, Sweetie, even if I could get away—and I think I would if I could, for I feel sure it would not be wrong—I have nowhere to go."

"We would find a place. I know of one, only no one must guess. I was thinking of Fancy. You remember that she was married to a Kentish man, Will Saunders, about two years ago?"

"Yes; I gave her a wedding present. I had a little money of my own then to do as I liked with."

"Well, Fancy and her husband that did live somewhere about Maidstone live now in London, and they have rooms to spare; and you would be safe with Fancy, who would do anything for you. Wherever you are, you must be with some steady, respectable married woman, so that slander may not be able to wag its spiteful tongue."

"If I eloped all by myself, it would wag, I am afraid."

"Never mind; you need not hear it, and you could soon live it down. 'There's no smoke without fire,' they do say; but the smoke that comes of striking a brimstone match is soon puffed out; and nobody in their senses heeds a will-o'-the-wisp."

"There is another difficulty: I have no money for a journey, nor to pay Fancy and her husband, for I could not be sure of work—at least, not directly."

"I have thought of that, my lady dear. I always meant my savings for you; but the nice little sum I had laid by in the bank all went when my poor, misled grandson got into trouble; and if your dear father, my lord, had not bought me an annuity I should have been dependent for a crust and a roof to cover me now in my old age. But I have something put by—I could not spend all my income if I would—and I pay Martha well, as she'll own; and there's the money all ready for my burying, and a decent tombstone, and good mourning for everybody as belongs to me. Please open that cupboard by the bed, and give me the little box you'll see with a broken mandarin a-top of it."

Clarissa handed it to the old woman, who took out first some ancient letters and receipts, and then a small packet, carefully done up in tissue-paper. This she opened. "There, dear, I've kept *that* for you," she said; "see, there are ten £5 Bank of England notes and nine golden sovereigns and some silver—fifty-nine pounds fourteen and sixpence in all. Take it; I've wanted to give it you for ever so long, for no mortal creature knows of it, and I may be called any day. Don't spend a penny of it now; keep it till it's wanted, and it will be wanted, you will find. There, don't say a word; if you *won't* have the notes, the fire shall. That money will carry you to London, if needs be that you go, and will keep you there in Fancy's house safe and comfortable, owing nothing to nobody, till you can get more in an honourable way. And now, my lady dear, it's getting quite dark, and they must not have it to say that you were out late when the Countess was absent. I hear Tim, the under-keeper, in the kitchen; he will walk home with you; he's got daughters of his own, and he'll take care of you. Don't leave Orwell till you can't help yourself, but when Chatters comes don't tarry, and that's my advice."

And Clarissa resolved that she would not. She thought she saw her way before her, though as yet but very dimly. She did not hesitate to keep the money. Sweetie would never take it back; but she might return it with interest to Martha some day, if only she were fortunate with her pictures. When she reached the Castle no one seemed even to have missed her. The Countess and her party had not returned, and Clarissa, when she lay down to rest several hours later, thanked God for the renewal of hope and for the happiest day she had known for many a month.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A LAST APPEAL.

“A frog he would a-wooing go,
 Whether his mother would let him or no.
 ‘Heigho!’ says Rowley.”

JUNE, the month of roses, arrived, bringing with it, not only flowers, and song-birds, and warm sunshine, and fragrance of new-mown hay, but the person whom, of all others, Clarissa most dreaded to encounter. The Countess had not again condescended to enter into any particular conversation on this obnoxious subject, but references were frequently made to Clarissa's impending marriage, and, naturally enough, her supposititious engagement became known, not alone to the different members of the household, but to the entire neighbourhood of Orwell, far and near. And though she, of course, denied the imaginary fact whenever opportunity occurred, few, if any, of the persons to whom she spoke seemed fully to believe her word; and it was generally supposed that out of modesty, girlish shyness, or mere coquetry, she objected to any open declaration of her strange betrothal. Mrs. Sweetapple, too, contradicted the reports as they came to her, in her seclusion; the old Rector, who had christened her, and her father before her, declared that he could not bring himself to credit the news; and Dr. Hammond flatly refused to accept the testimony of any other witness than that of Lady Clarissa herself.

It happened that one morning he met her with two of the little girls, taking a walk through the village, and he at once determined to ascertain the truth.

“Lady Clarissa,” he commenced, “you and I are old friends, and your esteemed father and myself were friends also. May I, on the strength of a life-long intercourse with your family, ask a question, which otherwise I should not presume to ask?”

“You may, Dr. Hammond,” she replied; “I am sure

you will ask nothing which it does not become me to answer. I think I know—I guess what it is you are wishing to inquire.”

“I have heard that you will shortly be married—is that the truth?”

“As monstrous an untruth as it is possible to conceive.”

“I thought so; I was certain of it. How did so wild a report get abroad?”

“I hardly know. I heard it first from Lady Orwell's lips. She assured me that I was engaged to Mr. Chatters, and she only laughed and mocked when I indignantly scouted the idea.”

“You have plainly refused Mr. Chatters?”

“I have never been subjected to the insult of his proposals; he has not presumed so far, in spite of his patroness's encouragement. Not one word, beyond the simplest common-places, has ever passed between us; but he has from the first carried himself towards me with a most repellant and impertinent familiarity. I have reason to believe that he speaks of me as his betrothed, and that in order to bear out his baseless assertion, he tells the most abominable falsehoods, not hesitating to declare that I have frequently met him by appointment within the precincts of the park. And Lady Orwell credits, or pretends to credit, his falsehoods.”

“Well, I am very glad I asked you, Lady Clarissa.”

“I am glad you did; may I request that you will, *on my own authority*, flatly contradict the rumour whenever it crops up in your presence?”

“I promise. But you will be placed in awkward circumstances when the fellow returns here, as I am informed he is about to do. You ought, if possible, to leave Orwell.”

“Pray take care what you say!” she replied in French, with a glance at the little Lady Louisa Maria, whose keen black eyes shone with a peculiar expression that seemed to intimate that she would presently report the whole conversation to her lady-mother. She and her sisters had learnt, as soon as they were capable of drawing a palpable inference, that tittle-tattle respecting their elder sister was invariably listened to with ready ear, and that complaints of her were always complacently received.

"I understand," said the Doctor; "I cannot speak French, but I catch your meaning—a case of little pitchers and long ears, eh?"

"Very long ears! with a tongue to match, and a most retentive memory on an occasion like the present."

The Doctor nodded, perfectly comprehending the situation; but the little girl frowned, and was evidently puzzled. Her small wits were not yet sufficiently sharpened to enable her to take in the full meaning of an innuendo. But she caught at the familiar expression which she had heard scores of times in the nursery, and exclaimed, "'Little pitchers!' That's me! I know what you mean, and I'll tell ma!"

"Pray do, sweet child," said the Doctor, suavely. And then, feeling that further conversation was inexpedient, he lifted his hat, and proceeded on his way.

Lady Louisa Maria at once resumed the subject: "Clary, you are a naughty girl! You tell fibs."

"No, I do not, Louie; I should be very much ashamed to tell fibs like a little girl I know, who very often says things which are not true. Fibbing is both wicked and mean."

"But you did tell a big fib—a downright *lie*! You said you were not going to be married."

"And I am not. You may believe me, Louie—and you know I never deceived you yet—when I tell you that nothing is more unlikely than my marriage. I cannot explain, for you could not understand; but you may be quite sure that whatever happens, whatever people may say about me, I am not even thinking of being married."

"Not to Chatters?"

"Certainly not to Chatters, nor to anyone else."

"But ma says you *are* to marry him, and Orwell says so, too! And when Chatters is our curate, you are to live at Eglantine Cottage, on the other side the church, and Selina and I are to be your bridesmaids; it's all settled."

"I never heard such nonsense—such utter nonsense—in my life!" began Clarissa, impatiently; and then she checked herself, remembering how useless it was to be angry with the child, who only repeated the lesson she had been sedulously taught. She quietly continued: "It is all

a mistake, Louie. I shall want no bridesmaids, for there will be no wedding!"

"Won't there?" replied Louie, nodding sagaciously. "We shall see when Chatters comes home!"

"When is he coming?"

"Next week, I think—or perhaps it's the week after."

Next week! The crisis was drawing alarmingly near. In a few days she would probably be called upon to decide her fate, to make her choice between flight and unbearable persecution, to resort to expedients from which she recoiled and which yet seemed inevitable. That night, when all around her were sleeping, she took counsel with herself, and tried to look her position and its possible consequences calmly in the face. After long thought and earnest prayer, she took her resolution, which to herself she thus expressed:—"I will do nothing rashly; I will not yield to impulse, not even to justifiable resentment; I will not leave my home till I am forced from it! I did think I would fly before Chatters came, but I see now that would be imprudent. It might even be said that I went to him; besides, it is just possible that I may make him ashamed of himself. He cannot, to my face, persist in his audacious falsehoods; he dare not tell *me* that I have ever met him by appointment, ever heard him speak one word of what he presumes to call his *affection*. And if I cannot quench his insolence—if I cannot crush his unwarrantable aspirations ere he breathe them, I can at least appeal to Lady Orwell. She is a woman; she will not surely allow me to be insulted, persecuted, slandered, in my own dear father's house. Yes, to her I will make my last appeal, and conjure her in the name of all that is most sacred both in heaven and earth to protect me, and secure me from this bold man's hateful importunities. And if all should fail—if he is too strong for me—if she will not listen, then my way is plain. I must leave Orwell, and, asking God to guide, and bless, and keep me from shame and evil, I will try if I cannot make my own way in the world. I cannot be more of a menial than I am here; I cannot have more ungenial tasks; I will not be above any kind of honest labour; I will forget that I am Lady Clarissa Oakleigh; and I will, God helping me, labour patiently with hands

and head in the station to which, as I sincerely believe, Providence now calls me. But I must count the cost; I must be deliberate; I must take no step hastily—impulsively.”

And so a few days passed on, and nothing particular transpired; only Orwell remarked, in Clarissa's hearing, that old Chatters was coming back in less than a week, and that he would remain at Orwell all the summer, up to October. She gathered also that the young man had already left Oxford, and was on a visit to his mother, who lived in Warwickshire, “to talk over,” as Lady Orwell professed to suppose, “his own concerns, especially his ordination and his approaching marriage.” Clarissa never, on principle, mentioned his name, never asked the slightest question respecting his movements, and she refused to evince the smallest interest in such tidings of him as reached her ears; and yet it was apparent that all about her continued to view her as Alfred Chatters' promised bride!

He came at last. Clarissa had not been apprised of his advent, and she felt something like a shock when, an hour or two after his arrival, she encountered him on the grand staircase. She felt furious with herself, knowing that face and neck were instantly all aglow, and she dreaded to think how he might interpret these signs of feeling. But she did not pause; she simply bowed, as she would have bowed in common courtesy to any other dependent of the family who returned to the Castle after prolonged absence, and passed on, without a word.

“Lady Clarissa! I say—Lady Clarissa!” she heard behind her, but she did not turn back. She went swiftly forward, and he passed along the corridor—*whistling!* A little later, and Coralie came to her with a message:—“Miladi's love, and she wished miladi Clarisse to dine with her that evening.”

“Lady Orwell does not dine alone, I suppose?” she asked of the *soubrette*.

“But, no,” replied Coralie; “*certainement non!* Milords, the little Earl and Mr. Oakleigh” (the Honourable Augustus) “will dine with miladi, their mamma, and also Monsieur Chatter will be of the party. Miladi Clarisse knows that M. Chatter has arrived to-day?”

Coralie always called him *M. Chattaire!* Clarissa's first impulse was to excuse herself, but on second thoughts she resolved to know the worst. The war, if it must be undertaken, should be waged on the enemy's own ground; it was useless to defer, to try to shirk the encounter. What was evaded to-day would only be stored up for the morrow, and it was best, wisest, safest to know at once what she had to expect from this most unwelcome, ungenial suitor. She must see what line he would take, what tactics he would adopt, before it was possible to decide upon her own course of action. So she gravely replied that she accepted the Countess's invitation, and would be in the drawing-room at the usual hour; privately resolving, however, not to make her appearance till the moment for the second bell should be close at hand. She would watch Lady Orwell and her boys into the drawing-room before she entered it herself; for as the hour of fate drew nigh she wished to defer it by keeping Chatters at arms' length, and avoiding a private interview as long as possible. She timed herself so well that the first notes of the clang that summoned them to the dining-room sounded before she had been quite half a minute in the drawing-room. Chatters was there, with Lord and Lady Orwell. "Mr. Oakleigh," as everybody was now instructed to call Augustus, was not present; he had indulged so freely in certain Banbury cakes brought by Chatters, as to be incapacitated from dining at all that day. Chatters came forward as Clarissa entered, and met her with extended hand, and the brief, familiar salute of "How do?"

Clarissa took no notice of the proffered hand; bred up as she had been in strict notions of propriety, the young man, even had he been her equal, would scarcely have seemed to her warranted in taking so much liberty. Besides, the manners of that day were still tinctured with the severity and precision of a former generation; *minuets* were still danced by ladies of high degree, low curtsies were not yet out of fashion, and the intercourse between young people of the opposite sex was, in the upper classes at least, extremely formal and reserved. Had Alfred Chatters been a gentleman in Lady Clarissa's own rank, he would not have dreamed of accosting her with so little

ceremony. As it was, he simply treated her as he would have treated any girl of his own standing, and the Countess was not likely to reprimand him.

With a most stately bow, and with her coldest, haughtiest expression of countenance—which expression always exasperated Lady Orwell, because she knew that she could not herself assume it—Lady Clarissa swept by, and addressed herself to her little brother, who was making original experiments on his mamma's crape skirt. Then, before there was time for any sort of remark, the great bell was heard, and the Countess drew her son's arm, as well as she could, within her own, saying, "Orwell will take me in to dinner; Clarissa, accept Mr. Chatters' arm."

But Clarissa declined the arm, as she had previously rejected the hand, and, silently gathering up her long skirts, took her way, unsupported, to the dining-room. The footman who held the door as they passed grinned, and those in attendance in the corridor beyond exchanged meaning glances. They all secretly sympathised with Clarissa, and rejoiced in the obvious discomfiture of "that jackanapes," as in moments of confidence they were accustomed to style the tutor. Under no circumstances is a favourite popular in a community, whether it be a court, a household, or a private family, and Chatters, arrogant and pretentious to the last degree, and constantly giving himself what the servants called "airs," was no exception to the rule.

But Lady Orwell was not so easily to be routed; she had arranged her little programme, and no deviation could be permitted. It was part of the *carte-du-jour* that Chatters and Clarissa should have "their opportunity," and have it they must under any circumstances, and whether they desired it or not. It may well be imagined that Clarissa was wholly intent on avoiding a private conversation; while Chatters was so horribly nervous, that he committed no end of blunders during dinner, and exposed himself to the ridicule of the tall footman behind his chair. No sooner had the Countess trifled with her forced strawberries and apricots, and drunk her prescribed glass of old Madeira, than she rose, saying to her son, who was still intent upon his dessert, "Come with me, Orwell,

I have a splendid peach for you upstairs. Never mind Clarissa and Chatters, they have something to say to each other to which *we* are not expected to listen ! ”

The boy quickly took his cue, and, lured by the prospect of the fruit, did not object to accompany her ladyship. He hastily filled one hand with strawberries, while with the other sticky paw he clutched his mother's dress.

Clarissa, alarmed, began to remonstrate. “ Indeed, I have nothing to say ! I will go with you, if you please. I think the children must want me.”

“ Never mind the children to-night,” returned her ladyship, with her most condescending air. “ If you have nothing to say, Mr. Chatters has, I know ; ” and before Clarissa could stir a step towards her, she had disappeared.

For an instant Clarissa stood irresolute ; then the courage of her race and all her woman's pride came to her assistance. She took her seat again, resolved to hear what Chatters had to say, because sooner or later it would certainly be said, and the sooner she knew her exact position the better. She sat perfectly still, and not so much as an eyelash trembled. She looked quite composed, but very much, the young man thought, as Juno might have looked when addressed by one of the inferior deities, or by some presumptuous mortal who discovered, all too late, his tremendous and perilous mistake. How he envied that calm, collected mien, and what a stately creature she was for one so young and small of stature ! He prided himself on his coolness and assurance, and had frequently boasted that he was not to be cowed or put out of countenance by any man or woman living ; but at this moment he felt anything but comfortable, and he fidgeted and almost choked himself with the wine he hastily swallowed while he was trying to frame a speech appropriate to the occasion. And there sat Lady Clarissa, cold and serene as any statue—as immovable as a fate ! He drank more wine, without the slightest conception of its taste ; he devoured an apricot, which might as well have been a turnip for all his appreciation of its flavour ; he all but upset a finger-glass, and he played nervously with the stopper of the decanter nearest to him. Oh, if she would only speak,

however contemptuously! if she would only stir one of those white fingers so firmly folded on the dark mahogany! if her eyelids would but quiver! if—if—anything in the world would but happen to break the spell in which her stillness and silence seemed to hold him! He called himself a thousand fools for being such a coward in the presence of a girl who had been placed by her natural guardian at his disposal, and who, as he flattered himself, had no alternative but to marry him—a girl who was penniless, who was no beauty, who had no friends—that he knew of—who was associated with the servants of the household, who was, he had been assured, “no better than he was!” And yet, in spite of all, he found himself in the greatest difficulty when he essayed to come to that understanding with her which he had previously supposed to be the simplest and easiest thing in the world. At length he mustered up courage—he made a desperate plunge, and spoke.

“I say, Clarissa, you don’t seem at all glad to see me!”

She looked at him quite calmly; as far as he could observe, not a pulse stirred, as she answered gravely, “*Lady* Clarissa, if you please, Mr. Chatters!”

Then he changed his tactics, and, shuffling his own chair towards her, tried to possess himself of her left hand.

“Be good enough to keep your distance,” was all the encouragement he received.

“I *say*, now!” he said, trying to assume an air of confidence, “this is too bad, to treat a fellow so! And I don’t deserve it, ’pon honour, I don’t! You’re enough to freeze melted butter by the kitchen fire! Of course, I don’t want you to drop into my mouth, like an over-ripe cherry! Girls shouldn’t be too forward, and a man doesn’t care for a woman that puts no value upon herself. It’s light come light go, you know, in love, as in many other matters. But there’s *reason* in all things! and if you, being ‘my lady,’ think it too much to meet me half-way, you might give me just some little token of encouragement, some little word or look—a great deal may be said by looks, the language of the eye, you know!—

just a hint that I am not altogether disagreeable to you."

"But you are altogether disagreeable to me! I strongly object to your society, and I only endure it, at present, because I think it due to myself to correct the strange misapprehension into which you have somehow fallen."

"What strange misapprehension?"

"You have had the audacity to say that I regard you—you—with so much favour that I have consented to become your wife."

"Well! *and haven't you?* Lady Orwell vows you are only playing the coquette. Besides, I saved your life."

"As to that, but for you, I think, I should not have been in the water at all. However, for your service, such as it was, I thank you, just as I should thank any keeper or labourer on the estate for the same service. But I never heard that one was constrained by any rule of honour to marry a person, simply because he rescues one from death."

"You despise me because I am not noble, because I am a poor tutor."

"I despise you because you tell base lies of a friendless, helpless girl! Yes, and I despise you because you are *not* noble, but most ignoble, in soul, and speech, and action. I am not alluding to birth, which is a mere accident as far as we ourselves are concerned, but to your manifest meanness of character, as exemplified in a hundred different ways, and especially in your conduct towards myself. I hope I make myself quite understood."

"You could not speak much more plainly," he replied, with bitterness. "I thank you for your opinion of me; but take care! take care! Lady Clarissa; you may go too far! There are limits even to a fond lover's toleration."

"You dare to threaten me! I am not afraid!"

"Don't you see that you are in my power, you proud, disdainful miss?"

"That I am not."

"Yes, you are! Everybody believes that you and I are lovers. It is all over the country how you met me evening after evening last autumn, and sometimes after dark, too,

when young ladies who value their characters are supposed to be safe at home! What will the world say of you if it hears that you behaved so lightly, that I dared not trust my honour in your keeping?"

Then she rose, and drawing herself up, transfixed him with her gaze. "Hush!" she said, sternly. "God hears you, and He will one day—perhaps sooner than you expect—make you account for your wicked, shameful, false words! I leave you! I should think *lightly* of myself if I remained with you—vile as you are—another minute. I would sooner die—I would sooner beg my bread from door to door, without a shelter for my head—than I would share your life, with all the good things this world has to give! Say what you please of me! I leave my good name where it is quite safe, in the keeping of my Heavenly Father!"

And before he could interpose, she was gone. "I have managed badly," he said to himself, as he drained another glass of port; "never mind! I shall have her in the long run. She has no one to whom to appeal—she has not, as I am told, more than a few shillings in her purse, and she is tired to death, as well she may be, of her ladyship's rampant 'lambs'! But really, I am not so sure that I want her! What a temper she has! Didn't her eyes flash fire! Didn't her lips breathe scorn! A charming vixen to take to one's bosom truly! I think I hate her! But I'll secure her, if it is only to humble her, and punish her. No, no!—backed as I am, you won't escape me, my Lady Clarissa; I shall be too strong for you. You are mine, if I choose it, as sure as fate!"

As for Clarissa, she went straight to the Countess, and told her almost word for word what had passed between herself and Chatters. She made her appeal in vain—her ladyship persisted in laughing at the girl's distress. At last, as Clarissa still implored, she lost her patience, and spoke out. "Come now!" she said, in that dogged tone which her step-daughter too well understood, "I am tired of this acting and nonsense! You will marry Chatters before next New Year's Day; make up your mind to it, for there is no appeal—*no appeal!* and I mean what I say. If you had a spark of proper pride in

you, you would marry any honest man rather than be dependent upon one who is only too thankful to be quit of you!"

"I thank you for saying so much, Lady Orwell. At this moment I feel as if I would gladly marry any *honest* man to escape your taunts. But I cannot put into the category of honest men him whom you would force upon me."

"Tut! tut! You marry Chatters, I say. It is all arranged. You must; you have no alternative; you are compromised!"

"I did not compromise myself."

"You are compromised, I say. And if you have no regard for your own character, I must guard it for you. Chatters will make you a good and suitable husband, if you don't exasperate him beyond all bounds before marriage. I have no more to say, and I won't even listen to any further appeal. Go to bed, and get up to-morrow morning determined to act like a sensible girl, and do your duty."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ON THE EVE OF DEPARTURE.

"When gathering clouds around I view,
And days are dark and friends are few,
On Him I lean who not in vain
Experienced every human pain,—
He sees my griefs, allays my fears,
And counts and treasures up my tears."

"YES! I have quite made up my mind," said Clarissa, next day, to Mrs. Sweetapple, whom she had of late visited pretty frequently. "Everything that happens tells me that Orwell can be my home no longer; everything points

to my departure, and I feel increasingly that I am doing nothing wrong in going away privately. But, Sweetie, my path is beset with difficulties; how is it all to be managed?"

"That we must see about at once, for I think now the sooner you are gone the better. I cannot bear the idea of your being under the same roof with that abominable young man. Why! you will never be free from his impertinences, you will never be secure against his presumptuous advances!"

"Never! He came into the room where I was with the little girls this morning, bringing me a fresh bouquet from the new greenhouse. And he said, with such a disagreeable smile, 'There, Clarissa! that's to show you that I bear no grudge, cruel as you were to me last night.'"

"You never accepted the flowers, my lady?"

"I did, and I did not. As I would not put out my hand for them, he laid them on the table before me, and in his presence I told Louie and Lina they might have them to dress up the nursery vases with. He remarked that he did not bring them for the children to pull to pieces, and I replied that I had no other use for them. A little while after Orwell came to ask me if I would ride. 'Mamma said I could go, and my own horse should be saddled for me!' I was not so stupid as not to understand that if I rode I should have the very companion I was so anxious to avoid, and I perceived also that I should be doing something of my own accord to favour the false report which is current, if I went galloping about the country with such an escort; so I declined, much as I longed to feel myself in the saddle again, and on dear old Gypsy's back. If I wish to go into the library or the conservatory, or to walk in the gardens, I am certain Chatters is on the look out to join me; it is miserable to feel oneself so watched and waylaid. Lady Orwell sent to say I was to dine with her, but I excused myself because I had already dined with the children, and because my head ached, and I wanted to get into the air. Then, when I saw my opportunity, I made quite an elopement, and came here, terrified at every step lest I should be followed. This is not to be borne, I think. It is impossible always to be

on the defensive, especially when the enemy is so much the stronger and the subtler."

"It is not to be borne, my dear. If you stayed, it would all end in your marrying the young man."

"No, no, Sweetie; anything but that!"

"You don't know, my dear lady. You don't know how it might be if you were persecuted continually, and worried out of your life, for weeks and months together. You might give in at last, because you were wearied and had no more strength left to continue the struggle, unequal as it must ever be. Besides, they are wicked people who hold you in their grasp now; you are no match for them in craft and cunning and hypocrisy. They will do all they can to injure your reputation, to compromise you so effectually that marriage with Chatters may come to be a sort of refuge."

"That is what I most dread, Sweetie. If they cannot take me by force, they will take me by guile. They cannot compel me to go through any legal ceremony, but I am terrified when I think how I may be after all entrapped by means which I cannot even suspect. I put myself into God's hands; but that does not release me from the necessity of using all justifiable means to help myself. Look whichever way I will, I see no refuge but flight."

"There is no other refuge, no other safety for you, my lady dear. And since you have decided to go, I am sure you ought not to defer your *flight*."

"How shockingly it sounds! There seems something so shameful, so terrible in running away from home!—and a girl, too."

"If you had only ordinary troubles to cope with, my lady, I should say, 'Have patience, and bear on; don't leave the natural shelter which is so necessary to the respectability of a young woman.' But Orwell Castle is no shelter for you; under its roof you are more likely to lose than to preserve your reputation; and Lady Orwell is not so proper a person to protect your youth and innocence as is Fancy Saunders—humble and lowly though she be. Now, then, my dear, let us set to work! we have talked enough about the unhappy needs be; let us at once proceed to lay our plans."

"It is so good of you, Sweetie, to identify your interests with mine. But I hardly know if I ought to let you help me. If Lady Orwell should ever guess that you were an accomplice in my evasion, you would be turned out of your pretty house without much ceremony."

"No doubt; but we will take good care that she does not guess. Besides, my annuity, thanks to my late dear lord, is safe. *She* cannot touch that! I should be a most ungrateful wretch if I did not do my utmost for my lord's own child in her extremity. You have that money all right, I suppose?"

"Every penny of it. And it is all I have, for my purse has never been replenished since my father died. I cannot understand about the money that dear Susan said Mr. Hadfield would keep for me. It would not be much—very little, perhaps, when all expenses were paid, for she had never thought it necessary to save till a short time before her death, and then only on my account; but *something* there surely would be, and though poor Mr. Hadfield is dead, the firm survives in the person of his sons, who are as trustworthy as their father. It is so very strange that they have not written to me."

"I dare say they have, but their letter has not reached you. When you are in London you can call and satisfy yourself. Now, the first thing, my dear lady, is to write to Fancy."

"I have written. And here is my letter, which I thought you had better address and post for me. And to you the answer must be returned. I have a strong suspicion that any letter addressed to me at Orwell Castle would be opened, and perhaps detained."

"Martha shall post it herself the first thing to-morrow morning. I know very well what Fancy's reply will be; she will think herself but too highly honoured, and she will do her very best to make you comfortable."

"I feel sure of that. But the great difficulty, it seems to me, will be to get away. Every person in Orwell village knows me; and if I hired a chaise at the 'Orwell Arms,' which is the only way I can think of, I should be traced immediately. And that, for every reason, I would guard against."

"You must, indeed. Neither the Countess nor Chatters must have the least idea where you are; no one in this place must know, not even Martha. Once in London, you are safe. I have always heard that London is the best place in all the world to get lost in."

"No doubt about that. If I can only get to London, there is no danger of my being molested by Chatters, or by anyone employed by Lady Orwell. The question is, how to get there unsuspected. I want to take some clothes, or else I shall have to buy evreything fresh, and that will dip too deeply into my purse, for I do not know how soon I shall be able to earn any money."

"You will sell your paintings, I think you said?"

"Yes, if I can. And I should think some of them will be sure to find purchasers. The worst of it is, I have scarcely touched my paints since this time last year, and I am sadly out of practice. I ought to have been working hard for the last twelve months, and I have not even finished one of the studies I had commenced last June. I feel that I cannot depend upon the sale of my pictures for some time to come. If it had not been for your bounty, my kind Sweetie, I do not know what would have become of me!"

"Nonsense, my dear, don't call it *bounty*. Who has so good a right to it as yourself? All I have, or ever did have, comes to me from your family. As for those few pounds, I don't need them, and never shall. I shall not want for anything long, for my time here must be short now. I think I quite puzzle the doctor, lasting out as I do. Well, I don't think it would do to hire a postchaise, though it would be properest, decidedly. It might get known, and you would get stopped, and for certain you would be easily traced on your road to London."

"If I could only get to Ipsley, there is the coach. Few people know me there, and I could wear a thick veil."

"I have thought of a better plan than that. You shall go to Hunsleigh Port, where there are always vessels of some sort sailing for London. You may as well travel by sea as by land."

"That I may, and I should prefer it. But how shall I ascertain what vessels are sailing?"

"Leave that to me. Martha's boy, Joseph, is at Hunsleigh Port, in a shipyard; and she has been talking about going to see him these six weeks. I only wish I could get there myself. But I can manage it."

"Will not Martha be compromised? Anybody who helps me at this crisis will be ruined, if the Countess only comes to know."

"Martha is sharp-witted, and she can keep a quiet tongue in her head. And yet, I won't trust her with your secret, so that, if she should be asked any plain questions, she may be able to say, '*I don't know*,' and yet tell no lie. I don't hold with lies, anyhow; but one isn't obliged to tell what one only *thinks* may be. I shall say to Martha, 'There's a certain young woman I want to befriend. She must get to London, unbeknownst to anybody in these parts. Go you to Joseph, and see what ship sails that will carry her, her passage-money being ready.' And if she asks, 'Who is it, mother?' I shall tell her not to mind who it is, because it's best she shouldn't know. She will guess, no doubt, but guessing isn't knowing, and she'll keep her guesses as silent as the grave."

"But how can I get to Hunsleigh Port? It is more than twenty miles away?"

"You must walk to Cottleby, that's four miles, and there you must take the carrier's cart from Orchester. Your boxes and things must be somehow sent on before you. You must make up your mind what you will take, and pack it all up in as small a compass as possible."

"I shall not want a great many clothes; very few dresses will do, for, of course, I shall live in strict retirement. I think all the wardrobe I require will go into one moderate-sized trunk. Then there is Susan's desk and dressing-case, which I must not leave behind. As for my mother's jewels, and a few other things, I can put those into a large hand-bag and carry them myself."

"The large trunk will be the only troublesome package, the smaller articles can be got here by degrees very easily. I wish I were not such a useless piece of old lumber, little better than bedridden! All I can do is to sit here and plan. Look you, my lady, you must come here as often as you can contrive during the few days that must elapse

before you leave the Castle, and you must never come empty-handed. You don't mind carrying as much as your strength will permit, I know."

"Indeed I do not. The chief difficulty will be to get here unperceived. The days are now at the longest, and there are so many people about, to say nothing of Chatters, always on the prowl. And if I am once suspected, it is all over with me."

"If you can evade the notice of the Castle-folk, you don't run much risk. Once you get into the little wood—the copse where you hid yourself years ago from your new governess, that Miss Rigby!—and you are pretty safe from observation. The rest of the way is lonely enough, so lonely I do not much like your coming along it by yourself; only everybody here knows you, and no one would think of insulting *you*."

"How would early morning suit? It is light by three o'clock."

"It would do very well, I should say. It is better, if you are caught, to be out at sunrise than in the dusk. But do you not sleep in the same room as the children?"

"I did till lately—till I began to have those fearful nervous headaches. Then I took courage, and told Lady Orwell that I could not sleep in the nursery-wing any longer. If I devoted my days to the children, I must have quiet nights, or I should very soon be on the sick list, and incapable of performing my duties at all! She was very cross, and made the demur I expected; but with all her faults, you know, she is not deficient in common sense, and she saw that I was making no vain complaint, so after a little grumbling and scolding and hints that young people had no right to nerves, permission was reluctantly accorded, and I went back to my old room, next to the schoolroom, and have passed my nights there ever since."

"That is fortunate! Having those nurses and the children always about you would have embarrassed you not a little. And that suite of apartments is really as retired as could be wished."

"It is more secluded now than ever. All those rooms have been avoided since Miss Shrosbery's death. She died in the schoolroom, which was our usual sitting-room, and

in the adjoining bedroom she lay in her coffin, and both apartments are shunned accordingly. I am never afraid of intrusion; really, sometimes I have been thankful that there is such a thing as superstition! I can pack there, and make my arrangements to my heart's content. I am not likely to be interrupted if I use a little caution."

"Do you remember getting out of the east-chamber window, when Miss Rigby locked you up? You used to climb and slip about like a cat."

"So I could now, I dare say; but I should not like to try that mode of egress or ingress. It was pardonable in a naughty, mad-cap child, who rather prided herself on risking neck and limb; but I should not like it to be brought against me, in days to come, that Lady Clarissa Oakleigh, in her eighteenth year, was guilty of such a freak! Getting out of window, except in cases of extremity, is decidedly improper, and, placed as I am, I cannot afford to give anyone the smallest ground of vantage against my reputation. Besides, I could not convey my parcels in that way."

"Of course not; you must not think of such a thing, though that shady nook of evergreens is very little overlooked; but there is the little door below, at the end of that half-dark passage, where people very seldom went in my time."

"It is that door I mean to make use of; it is so easily reached by the short flight of backstairs near the old nursery, which is now a lumber-room. The key has been in my possession since last summer, because on very hot days poor Susan liked to sit out there, under the great Portugal laurels."

"All that is in your favour. Must you go, dear? Well, take heart, and don't be faint-spirited. These are dark days now, but the sun shines somewhere, notwithstanding; and there is always a silver lining to every cloud, you know! Only, my dear lady, be very, *very* careful!—if once you give cause for suspicion, you will have spies set upon you. Come as early as you like in the morning; you will always find some of us stirring, and I cannot sleep much after sunrise. I get my best sleep now of afternoons."

"One thing more, Sweetie. I do not like doing it—I hate it; but I am afraid I must, in some sort, change my name. '*Lady Clarissa*,' living by herself in cheap apartments, will naturally excite people's curiosity, and somebody may make it his business to report my whereabouts to the Countess."

"There can be no harm, my dear, in your dropping your title for a while; you won't mind it much, I dare say?"

"I shall not mind it at all. Indeed, it seems out of the fitness of things that a girl with a title should be earning her bread, and living as I must live. And again, I must have some name whereby I shall be known in the artist world, if, indeed, I ever do succeed in making myself known there at all. Susan and I were talking about it long ago, and we agreed that I must select a professional name when the time came to exhibit; and she laughed, and said it would not be a '*nomme-de-plume*,' but a *nomme-de-crayon*! We almost decided on *Miss Clara Leigh*."

"That will do nicely. It is partly your real name, and it sounds professional enough. My late lord always called your dear mamma '*Clara*,' though her full name, like yours, was Clarissa. And '*Clara Grey*' was written in many of her books, as I well know. And *Leigh* stands very well without the *Oak*! Yes—*Miss Clara Leigh*!—nothing could be better. And if I were you, my dear, I would not take poor old nurse into confidence, not that she is less to be trusted than I am, but, from what I hear, her mind is not always very clear, and she rambles, they tell me, and does not quite know what she talks about."

"No! I will say nothing to nurse. She does ramble, and might easily let fall something quite unwittingly. Besides, I think a secret—and such a secret—would be a sore burden to her. Also, it may occur to them to question her. And it strikes me, Sweetie, that Lady Orwell will be pretty sure to catechise you!"

"Let her catechise! I am her ladyship's match any day. I hope she will come on one of my deaf days, when my infirmity is hard upon me. She is never good to hear, because her voice is harsh and thick, and if I do not listen—and I need not if I don't want to—it will be all

the same as if she talked High Dutch! It will be a case of cross questions and crooked answers, Lady Clarissa. Trust me not to put her on the scent; and I'll take care that Martha shall not really *know* your address, nor how you got away, nor anything that might get *her* into trouble."

From that hour Clarissa was abundantly occupied, both head and hands. She had her usual nursery duties, and her own affairs requiring full attention. She had to go over all her possessions, in order to determine what she would take with her, and then came the packing up of what was to go to London. There were many things she must perforce leave behind her, and much she regretted that there was no one to whose charge they could be safely committed, till suddenly it occurred to her that her deserted treasures would be quite safe in one of the haunted attics. If she stowed them away in a certain old chest that had never, as she knew to a certainty, been disturbed by anyone but herself during her lifetime, they would, in all probability, remain there untouched for years, till, by God's mercy, she might come back again in peace and honour, and claim her own.

Upon this thought she acted. Some few of her belongings that might be forwarded to her, should her schemes succeed, she determined to leave with Mrs. Sweetapple. Every morning she contrived to take her walks abroad before the rest of the world was astir, and every morning she carried to the Woodland Lodge some package or other made ready for the journey.

Fancy wrote to say she could receive her dear young lady at any day or hour. She had only to come, and be more than welcome; and she might be sure of all the loving and humble service that she and hers could render. It only remained now to make terms with the captain of the coasting-vessel at Hunsleigh Port, and to convey the luggage to that town. The carrier passed through Cottleby three times a week. As it seemed impossible to send away a large trunk without exciting notice, the different articles were made up into parcels, and packed at last in an old box of the ex-housekeeper's. And more than once Clarissa found it possible to despatch a garden-boy to

the lodge with packages that would have been a sore burden to herself. That she should send a few things to Mrs. Sweetapple surprised no one, and the boy was too humble and obscure to fall under the Countess's displeasure.

All went well, but Clarissa felt the continued strain almost more than she could bear. To a mind frank and ingenuous as hers, the concealment of her designs was most painful. She could not help regarding herself as engaged in a conspiracy! And yet she dreaded discovery more and more, for each succeeding day proved the desirability of her evasion. Everybody, from the Countess downwards, seemed in a plot to throw her under the influence of Chatters; and the young man himself, as may be imagined, was not slow to push his advantage. But that she knew that she would soon be beyond his reach, the persecution would have been unendurable; it required all her address, all her courage, to keep him at a respectful distance. A less brave spirit would have sunk beneath all she had to sustain and to guard against in those last trying days at Orwell.

At length, all arrangements were completed. Clarissa's property was safe at Hunsleigh Port, and her passage was taken. She was described by Martha and by her son as "a young woman in needy circumstances, but respectable and industrious, going to push her fortune in London."

Doubtless, Martha guessed who the respectable young woman really was, but her mother had said to her, when the first instalment of parcels arrived at the lodge, "Thee ask no questions, Patty, then thee canst answer none. Do as I bid thee, and leave the rest to me." And Patty, *alias* Martha, though over fifty years of age, was a dutiful and obedient child to her aged parent.

And so it came to the last day—the last evening; and, for the last time, Clarissa undressed her little sisters, and, for the last time, she said "good-night" to the Countess and to Coralie, who followed her to say, "You look so poorly, *miladi*; shall I help you to undress?" But Clarissa answered that she was only tired and rather nervous, and would prefer to be alone as usual. Looking

from the gallery-window, as she went to her room, she saw Chatters puffing away at his meerschaum among the flower-beds. Fervently she hoped that for the last time she saw his face. A few hours more, and she would be alone and unprotected on the road to London.

But, thank God, she had friends there—humble friends, but true, under whose roof she might in peace and honour rest her weary head.

“Ah!” she said, as she turned away from that last glance at the familiar landscape, which seemed sinking to repose in the grey twilight of that balmy midsummer eve; “if God were not my Friend and my Helper, I could not bear it! He sees all my sorrow; He knows all my pain, and He will—yes! I feel certain He *will* bring me safely through, and lead me, though now I can see only the single step before me, into pleasant pastures, and beside still waters.”

CHAPTER XL.

ON THE JOURNEY.

“Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene,—one step enough for me.”

CLARISSA had not much to do in the way of preparation. As soon as she had locked herself in her room, she packed the bag she intended to carry with her; then she placed in readiness the dress which she had arranged for the journey, and made all necessary dispositions before she lay down to rest, if not to sleep, for two or three hours longer if possible. She had made her calculations, and found that it would be best to start between four and five o'clock; not earlier, because the carrier, in whose cart she was to go to Hunsleigh Port, did not pass through Cottleby till nearly nine, and the difficulty was how to

dispose of herself during the time which was not occupied in walking, since she would certainly reach Cottleby by six, even if she loitered on the way. It was a comfort to reflect that the Orwell household was by no means given to early rising, so that she might reasonably hope to escape observation if she took her departure even a little later than she intended. She felt pretty certain that no one would be stirring much before six, but it seemed scarcely safe to run the risk, lest any unlucky chance should rouse one or another of the servants at an earlier hour than usual. She ought, she felt, to be clear of the Castle, and beyond the boundaries of the pleasure-grounds, before the clock struck five.

Now, as she slowly undressed, she heard eleven striking from the church-tower—she had at least five hours before her, in which to recruit herself, and gain strength and spirits for the journey. For the last time for many a day, probably for many a year, perhaps for ever, Clarissa knelt down in her accustomed place for her evening prayer. At first she could not sufficiently collect her thoughts. The home she was leaving was very dear to her, and that room, which had been hers ever since the advent of Madame Pierrot, especially so. “Where shall I be this time to-morrow night?” she involuntarily asked herself, and then she burst into an agony of tears, and wept convulsively. They were the first tears she had shed for many days, but they relieved her overcharged heart, and calmed down the excitement which had possessed her, and then she could calmly pray. Never had she been so much in need of help, in need of guidance, for never had she found herself in circumstances so painful and so critical. She knew that she was doing what would expose her to severest blame from all; and the “all” included nearly the whole world who might hear of her escape, so very few persons having any just idea of her true position in that household. She was possibly compromising her good name; she was certainly placing herself in the way of all sorts of perplexities and embarrassments; she was setting out on a strange and untried path; and once launched on the troubled sea of this life’s cares and dangers, there would be no putting back, no refuge, no friendly haven,

should the tempest rage, and winds and waves prove too mighty for her poor little bark, steered by one so feeble and so entirely inexperienced.

But once more came the comforting words, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble;" and again, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." So she besought that to her light and wisdom might be vouchsafed; that she might be defended in the dangers of the way before her, delivered from all her enemies, and brought safe at last to some quiet haven where, in peace, and honour, and grateful thanksgiving, she might pass her days. She entreated that God would be with her wherever she went, about her bed, and about her path continually; that she might be prospered in whatever work she undertook; and, finally, that her strength might not fail, nor her faith wax feeble, though tribulations should abound, and sorrows and cares perpetually abide with her. "To Thee I commend myself, O Friend of the friendless, O Father of all spirits, in whose hands are all human destinies; go Thou with me, never leave me nor forsake me, and bring me safe to Thine everlasting kingdom," were her last words; and then, feeling drowsy and wonderfully composed, she lay down and slept soundly till the grey dawn, stealing in through her unshaded windows, awoke her, and warned her that the commencement of her enterprise must no longer be delayed.

She dressed quickly, and prayed once more; then she looked at her watch, and found that it was not yet four, though the sun was already shining, and the birds were singing in the branches. It promised to be a beautiful midsummer day, and that she felt to be a real blessing, for a wet morning would have been a sad addition to her difficulties. She opened the door, and went out into the long, dim gallery, where all was still as death, save that she could still hear the twitter of the birds, and the loud tick of a clock in one of the adjacent chambers. There were no other sounds. She listened, and, as far as she could guess, the household yet slumbered peacefully. Then she

descended the narrow stairway, to which reference has been made. It brought her into a region of empty rooms and seldom-used offices, but it was near the larders, and not far from the dairy, to all of which she knew her way well enough, and which she had visited more than once, of late, in search of bread and milk, which she needed before her early morning walks. If she encountered any servants she could truthfully say why she was there, and for what reason she required food, for she had several times requested that a loaf and some milk might be left for her, of which she could partake before starting on her rambles. She cut a slice of bread and buttered it, and almost forced herself to swallow it, for she knew that sustenance was needful; and then, seeing cold meat and cooked poultry close by, she thought it would be only prudent to take with her a sandwich or two, since it was very uncertain how and when her next meal must be made. She preferred the beef to the chicken, as being more nutritious, and it behoved her to husband her forces, and above all the physical, so much depending now upon her own unaided efforts. The sandwiches ready, she adjourned to the dairy for a good draught of last night's milk, and that was much more welcome than the bread and butter, which she had the greatest difficulty in persuading herself to eat. Lastly, she went to the little door, of which she kept the key, unlocked it, and softly drew back the bolts, so that it remained only on the latch.

She regained her room, and found the upper stories still silent and undisturbed. She put the sandwiches into her bag, and then entered the sitting-room to take a last farewell of the place and of the few treasures she was forced to leave behind. The shabbily-furnished room was sacred ground to Clarissa; but she dared not trust herself to dwell even for a minute on what had been transpiring there just a year ago. Susan's portrait she had, at some risk, managed to get conveyed to the Woodland Lodge, and it was going with her to London. Her other pictures, save one or two that were hidden in the great chest upstairs, must remain where they were; so must her easels—it was impossible to take them away without exciting suspicion, and she regretted it, because she would be

obliged to spend money in buying new ones. Her paints, palettes, and brushes, &c., however, she had removed, and, to a certain extent, the room looked desolate and bare.

"Shall I ever stand here again?" was her thought as she placed her hand lovingly on the chair in which Susan had died: "Thou knowest, O, my God, and Thou wilt do for me that which is best and safest; *Thy will be done.*"

One more last look, and with firm step and resolute will she took her bag and her umbrella in one hand, threw her light cloak over the other arm, and rapidly—not daring to pause or to look behind—made her way to the unfastened door below. Another moment and she was in the open air, crossing the dewy sward towards the evergreen thicket, through which wound the retired path she judged it best to choose. Through the laurels and the rhododendrons, on which some lovely blossoms still lingered, she threaded her way, trembling with excitement, and starting even at the sound of her own footsteps and at the rustle of the leaves as she brushed them passing by. A few minutes' walk, and she was beyond the bounds of garden and shrubbery, and in the open park, and the road was straight before her. She had to pass the lodge gates; but she trusted no one would yet be stirring, and if she were seen, she might easily be taken for one of the servants, she imagined, in her plain dark dress, faded shawl, and close bonnet, over which a large brown gauze veil—such as people wore in those days—was drawn. And if the worst happened, and she were recognised, it might be hours before the old gate-keeper or his wife saw anyone from the Castle; they would scarcely deem it worth their while to take any trouble on her account. From her earliest childhood, as we have seen, she had been accustomed to take independent solitary rambles, so that her going forth at this early hour would scarcely surprise anyone who knew her habits.

And when she reached the lodge—the "Water Lodge" it was called, because a broad, shallow stream, an outlet from the Mere, ran near it—there were no signs of life, only a belated cat stealing home under the rose-bushes, and a squirrel leaping merrily from tree to tree. Close to the gate was a beautiful Provence rose-tree, covered with

glowing, richly-perfumed roses, on which the dew still glistened. Clarissa gathered several half-blown flowers as mementoes of the life that was even now becoming a thing of the dead past. She smelt them, inhaled their dewy fragrance, kissed them as if they were sentient beings, put them into her bag, and pursued her way, which now lay along the broad high road, and she had just four miles to walk to Cottleby.

But though the Castle people were indolent on this fine June morning, the village folk were not, and Clarissa saw several men at a distance, with forks and hay-rakes on their shoulders; and she heard a shout from a field hard by, telling her that the little world of Orwell beyond the park was already up and doing. She extremely disliked the idea of meeting the villagers, who, to say the least of it, would certainly wonder whither she was going alone, and equipped for a journey, at such untimely hours. She hesitated a moment, and then turned back for a few yards, and soon came to a narrow winding lane, where she would be less likely to encounter anyone who knew her.

It was a lovely little lane, with grassy banks covered with wild flowers, and high hedges all one mass of straggling honeysuckle and briar-roses. The worst of it was, that it was rather too dewy for comfort, and Clarissa rejoiced that she was thickly shod, and attired in raiment that was not easily bedraggled. The lane would take her through a thick pine wood, and then across fields, and along more lanes. She knew every step of the way, and it was a much longer journey than by the road. But that did not matter; indeed, it was rather an advantage, for she had abundance of time before her, and she did not wish to reach Cottleby till it was almost time for the carrier and his cart. So she went on quietly. She would not be missed till her little sisters were to be dressed, and then no one would suppose anything than that she had taken a longer walk than usual; and one of the nurses would dress Louie and Lina, and grumble all the while, and call Clarissa names; but that did not signify. By the time the Countess was informed of her absence she hoped to be safely lodged in the good man's cart, and well on her way to Hunsleigh Port. So, in the depths

of the wood, she sat down on a fallen tree, and took a little rest, for already her arms were aching with the unaccustomed weight she carried. She had borne heavier burdens to the Woodland Lodge, but then the way was short, not half the distance she had already travelled, and she was glad to think she need not hurry forward.

The sun mounting higher began to warm the air, which at first felt rather chilly. There was a light murmur among the odorous tall pines, flecks of sunshine fell across the shady path, and gleamed upon the mossy ground, thickly strewn with dry "pine-needles" of innumerable seasons. Every now and then a rabbit scampered to his hole, or scudded out of sight, and once a beautiful blue butterfly came flitting through the gloom and settled on the natural bench of which Clarissa had availed herself. She never forgot the aspect of the pine-wood as she saw it on that eventful morning. She was not aware at the time that she looked with any interest on the various objects about her, but afterwards, recalling the events of her journey, she found that every scene through which she had passed was, in all its details, indelibly imprinted on her memory.

She stayed till she felt rested, and then went on by field and wood and shady lane, meeting only one or two country lads, and a little girl who did not seem to recognise her. It was nearly eight o'clock when she saw the little square tower of Cottleby Church before her. She had had all instructions from Mrs. Sweetapple, so that she did not need to ask any questions. She went on till she came to the churchyard, which she entered. She was to rest there in the western porch, from whence she could see the road by which the carrier must arrive. She was to let him pass through the village, and make his usual call at the "Blue Dragon," and then, being on before him, she was to stop and request him to take her on to Hunsleigh Port.

She sat in the porch, thankful now for the shade, and doubly thankful for the rest, for she had walked at least six miles, the way she had taken being circuitous, and then it was quite a mile from the Castle to the Water Lodge, so that she had probably come nearly seven miles since her scanty breakfast in the larder. She ate one of

her sandwiches now with something like appetite, and she longed for another draught of milk, but she dared not go among the houses to seek for it, lest she should attract attention. In a few minutes, however, a little girl got over a stile, and entered a narrow pathway that crossed the churchyard to the road, and she carried a can, which Clarissa was almost sure contained new milk. As the child approached she took courage and accosted her, inquiring if she could give her a little milk in exchange for a penny. The little maiden stared, but she did not refuse, and Clarissa took from her bag a small tumbler, which she used when mixing water-colours, and which she had put in at the last moment, and said she would give her a penny for as much milk as would fill the tumbler twice. The bargain was concluded, and Clarissa felt all the better for her second breakfast.

Presently the church clock struck nine, and Clarissa began to feel anxious. Suppose the carrier should not come that day! Suppose his hours were changed! Suppose his cart should be so loaded that he had no room for a passenger! Her eyes ached with looking down the dusty white road for the cart that came so tardily. Her anxiety was growing into terror, when at last she saw in the far distance a cloud of dust, and then a sort of van—half-covered cart, half-omnibus—advancing slowly on its way. But it was the long-desired vehicle, and she watched it up to the inn-door, and then leaving her shelter, proceeded through the village, and when about half-a-mile beyond it, awaited, with beating heart, the arrival of the carrier.

It seemed hours rather than minutes while she waited, and she had to summon all her courage, when at last he came along, his horse trotting briskly, ere she could frame her request to be taken as a passenger. He stopped, however, and she saw, with exceeding satisfaction, that he was alone, and that he looked like a kindly, honest man.

“Want a lift, young woman?” he asked, rather roughly, but not rudely. Clarissa replied that she wanted to go to Hunsleigh Port, and would pay him for the journey.

He looked at her a moment, evidently surprised at her soft voice and refined speech; but he answered, “Get up, then, and make haste! You should have mounted at the

'Blue Dragon,' where there's a horse-block, all convenient. Put your foot on the wheel, and then on the shaft. Woa, Jack, woa! He don't understand stopping again so soon, because passengers, when I have any, always gets up at the 'Dragon.' There! steady, now! that's it! You'd best sit on Jack's bag of hay; for my cart, it don't go on very easy springs, and we've a mile or two of very rough road to go over. Be you all right, miss? Gee up, Jack!"

And Clarissa was safely on her road to the wished-for goal of Hunsleigh Port, where Mrs. Martha's Joe, who had never lived at Orwell, and would not know Lady Clarissa, was to meet her, and put her under the care of the captain of the *Mermaid*, the small vessel which was to take her on to London Docks.

The carrier would have liked to converse, but Clarissa felt too much tired and too sad at heart to enter into conversation; so after a little while he contented himself with making occasional remarks, and addressing remonstrances to his plodding horse, which seemed determined not to vary from one jog-trot pace after the first two miles beyond Cottleby. It was past middle day when they stopped at "The Ship," in the busy, fishy-smelling High Street of Hunsleigh Port; and Clarissa, having paid her fare, alighted, feeling very stiff, and aching in every limb, from the terrible jolting of the cart. As she stood in the archway of the inn-yard, irresolute as to her next movement, she was accosted by a young man of rough speech and nautical appearance:—"Be you from Orwell, miss?" Clarissa faintly answered in the affirmative; she did not feel quite certain that this was Sweetie's grandson, to whose charge she was committed. But she was soon reassured as he continued, "Mother said as how you was a friend of grannie's as wanted to get to London cheap and on the quiet, and she told I to meet you, and take you to a decent place where you could get a meal, and then see you safe aboard the *Mermaid*, which don't ship her anchor till the evening; so there ain't no hurry, which is lucky, for Peter there is best part of an hour behind time. Ay, he's a slow coach, any day. Come along, miss; I'll carry your bag."

Clarissa followed her escort down the street, and through several narrow, tortuous lanes, which he called "rows"—they all smelt villanously of fish and tar. Presently they emerged upon the beach, where all sorts of small vessels were drawn up; some lading, some unlading, some apparently deserted. A few larger ships were riding in the basin, a fleet of boats was coming in from sea, and everywhere were masts, sails, nets, anchors, capstans, oars, and sailors; just such a medley as one finds in the neighbourhood of docks in a minor seaport, or in what is generally called the "old town" of a prosperous and growing watering-place.

It was, in fact, to Old Hunsleigh that Joe had brought Clarissa. They stopped at last at a small, wooden-built, tarred house, with clean windows and whitened doorsteps, and Joe walked in. "Here, mother Peggy!" he cried to someone who was evidently busy upstairs; "here's the young woman from Orwell that my mother told you to expect. Come down and see to her, will ye? She's pretty well dead-beat, seems to me. Sit ye down, miss—Peg's a-coming."

Clarissa sank into a well-cushioned chair, near the fire, by which a pot was simmering, and Joe, telling her he would come for her about dusk, and that he could not stop a moment longer then, hurried away, before the mistress of the house made her appearance. Clarissa sat up nervously, as a heavy step was heard descending the stairs, but she was reassured when a brown-faced, motherly-looking woman made a curtsey, and said she was very glad to see her. The curtsey seemed quite natural to Clarissa, but it is a fact that mistress Peg had not come down with any idea of being deferential. She had expected a girl of her own class—an under-servant probably—to whom she had promised to be kind, and to whom she could talk familiarly; and here was certainly a young lady, and, as it seemed to her, a young lady in disguise! That, however, as she said afterwards, was "neither here nor there!" Gentle or simple, the poor thing wanted to be "mothered," and she had come to the right shop for that when she came to her, Peggy Tibbs, the mother of thirteen children, all alive and prospering! So she spoke tenderly, though

respectfully, to Clarissa. "Sit ye still, my dear, you look just tired to death; but perhaps you would rather go upstairs, for it's hot here, 'cos of the bit of fire I must keep for the cooking—and the back place smokes so when the wind is in this quarter. Then, too, it's open house down here; all my neighbours steps in, as I steps into them, if I feels disposed, and p'raps you'd like to be more private?"

Clarissa thought she would rather not run the gauntlet of all the neighbours, and the small kitchen really was oppressively hot; she was afraid, too, she was going to have one of her bad, prostrating headaches. So she followed her hostess to the upper room, where all was clean and quiet and comfortable, and as cool as it could be on such a burning day.

"Now then," said Mrs. Tibbs, "take off your bonnet and shawl, and put your feet up, and lie back in that easy chair, while I dish ye up a bit of dinner. I've got as nice a stew in the pot as ever you tasted, and I'll give ye the recipe if ye would like to have it:—'A neck of lamb, not too fat, cut up into pieces and simmered—never let come to the boil—till it's that tender it melts in your mouth, and with it green peas, and two or three young carrots, if ye can get them, and sweet herbs, and half-a-dozen spring onions, just to flavour, with a drop of mushroom catsup, and pepper and salt to taste.' A sea-captain's wife gave me the recipe, she did, and 'if it's homely it's a fine dish, fit for a lady of title,' says she. And I do hope you'll relish it."

"Thank you! I am sure it will be nice," replied Clarissa; and Mrs. Tibbs bustled down to prepare her dinner-tray, little guessing that she really had got ready her appetising stew for a "lady of title." In ten minutes she was back again, and Clarissa's dinner was before her. At first she thought she could not eat a mouthful, but as she ate a little, appetite returned, and certainly Mistress Tibbs had not overpraised her cookery. The stew was served in coarse earthenware, the knife and fork were black-handled and roughly made, the spoon was pewter, the pepper-box japanned tin, and the salt, which was neither fine nor white, was in an old pomatum-pot. But the stew itself was delicious, and everything was as clean

as it could be; and Clarissa made a better dinner than she expected, though her hostess scolded her for not eating more, and vainly coaxed her to try "just another little bit."

"But ye don't ought to drink cold water, child," she said presently, "and I haven't got no wine, an' I doubt ye wouldn't take to my beer."

"Oh, no, thank you," replied Clarissa, "I always drink water at my meals; I never take stimulant except as medicine."

"Stimulant! I don't know what that is. I only know beer, and port, and sherry, and British wines—which ain't worth the drinking—and spirits. Ah! I know, I'll give you a drop of medicine."

And away she went into another room, but soon she reappeared with a little glass in her hand, half full of *something*. "There now," she said, "you just drink that—'tis what you want—I shan't charge it."

"It is brandy," said Clarissa, as she held it in her hand.

"It's medicine," returned Mrs. Tibbs, "and you've got to take it. Don't sip it, drink it down; maybe it's tincture of rhubarb!"

Clarissa drank it obediently. She felt she could trust Martha's friend, and she was not strong enough just then to make resistance.

"There now, that's a good lass," said Mrs. Tibbs, taking back the tumbler; "now I'll tell ye what ye've taken—just a dessert-spoonful of the *finest* French brandy that was ever distilled, in twice the quantity of water; and that brandy *never paid no duty!* It will do ye a sight of good, for ye wanted a fillip to make ye go to sleep—one can't sleep if one is over tired. Now lie you down on that bed, and I'll put yer shawl over you, and go to sleep like a dear. Ye'll be as safe as if ye was in your own mother's keeping, and I'll come and wake you when the right time comes."

Thankfully Clarissa acceded to the kind proposal. In five minutes after she lay down the bustle on the quay outside sounded like a lullaby, thoughts and remembrances became confused and dim, and in five minutes more she was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XLI.

"THE MERMAID."

"Wherever He may guide me,
No want shall turn me back;
My Shepherd is beside me,
And nothing can I lack.
His wisdom ever waketh,
His sight is never dim,
He knows the way He taketh,
And I will walk with Him."

"Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene,—one step enough for me."

AND while she slept, Clarissa dreamed—a strange and beautiful dream. She thought she was journeying alone and desolate across a wide arid plain; her feet were bare and bleeding, her garments were old and tattered, the path was flinty, overhead was a scorching sun, in a cloudless but dun-coloured sky, and she was so weak and tired that she could scarcely struggle on. She looked around—not a tree, not a shelter of any kind, not a living creature was in sight—there was nothing behind, before, on either hand, but the great bare, sandy desert, and night would soon arrive, and the wild beasts would come forth, and she would have neither food, nor defence, nor resting-place! And on she went plodding through the wilderness, wishing in her great misery that she might die. Presently she was in a mighty city. It did not seem like London; she had never seen the streets before, and she was alone, as she had been on the great plain. But the solitude was worse here than there, for the multitudes who passed by scowled at her, some jeered and laughed, some mocked at her rags and naked feet; no one offered her bread, or a refuge where she might lay her head, or uttered one kindly word. It seemed to her in her dream that a long, long time passed, and there arrived no relief. Sometimes she was in the desert, sometimes in the un pitying, stony streets; now

it was midnight darkness, now a burning tropical noon ; but always the sense of desolation and of anguish and dismay. And then—she had prayed almost wildly for help—an angel came to her, and told her that God had sent him to bid her be of good cheer, for the days of trial would soon be over, and she would be blest above all that heart could wish. Aid was coming—coming fast—and joy was coming too—joy and love and peace, till her cup should be brimful and running over. And the angel led her up and down the city, and across the wilderness, till at last he said, “Now must I leave thee, dear child ; but thou art in thy Father’s land, and it shall be well with thee now, henceforth, and for ever. Blessed are they who shall be steadfast to the end. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning ! *Be thou faithful unto death !*”

And when she turned to answer the angel, he was another, yet the same. The sheeny wings, the glistening robe, the radiant brightness, the aureole, were gone, and instead thereof were mortal lineaments, time-worn and sad ; kind eyes, grey locks, and a frame somewhat bent—and yet the face of the stranger, though purely human, seemed one with that of the celestial visitant ; and while Clarissa gazed with wonder and with awe, not unmixed with reverent affection, she awoke—and she was on the humble bed, covered with her shabby shawl, in Mrs. Tibbs’ hospitable upper chamber—and behold ! it was a dream.

Only a dream—a mere phantasy of the o’er-wearied brain ; but somehow it comforted the forlorn girl, and she felt encouraged. But who was the stranger ? The face seemed familiar, even as it faded into vacancy. It was the face of one she had loved—or so she imagined—but when, or where ? It was not her father’s face ; it was not, as far as she could remember, that of anyone she had ever seen before. Would she see it in the days to come ? Would it be the face of a friend, when most she needed one ? An elderly man—such was the stranger of her dream—much worn, grey-headed, and with a long, iron-grey beard ; dark eyes—surely very much like her own. No ! they were her mother’s eyes, as she had seen them in her portrait, and full of kindness, sweetness, and pure

benevolence. A man whose face, whose whole mien and aspect, invited confidence; one whom she felt she could trust with life itself, and trust to death, if, indeed, such a man actually existed, and if they ever met. Two tremendous *ifs*, at thought of which Clarissa laughed at herself for her credulity.

And while she mused on her dream, which had been so vivid, and had seemed, especially at the last, so very real, she fell asleep again, and when next she awoke, the evening rays were slanting on the dark patched sails, and on the wooden pier she could see from the low window. The sea was like molten glass, flushing here and there to golden hues. She knew that it must be near the sunset hour. Ere she could rise Mrs. Tibbs came to the bedside. "What! you are awake?" she said, "I was coming to disturb you, for the *Mermaid* will sail in another hour, and you must have a good dish of tea before you say good-bye to the old port. Eh! but you have had a nice sleep. I've been in and looked at you several times, and there you were as fast as the Monument, which I never saw, because I never travelled to London town. Don't you feel quite fresh and peart, my ladybird?"

"I feel wonderfully better," said Clarissa, "only still a little stiff with being shaken and jolted in that dreadful cart. I thought some of my bones would be dislocated."

"And you are not used to riding about in carts, miss, I should say? You are more used to your own coach is my guess?"

Clarissa was silent, and resolved not to complain of the next vehicle in which she travelled, even if her bones were broken.

"Sure you are never going to service?"

"I do not know what I am going to. I am going to get my own living, for I have only myself to depend upon, and the money I have will not last me long. I am quite a poor girl."

"Poor you may be, but you are a lady! Deary me! Peggy Tibbs knows gentlefolks when she sees 'em, though she's nought but a mariner's wife herself. You can't say you're not a lady born, now?"

"Dear Mrs. Peggy Tibbs," replied Clarissa, sweetly, "pray do not question me! I have my secret, and a very sad secret it is, but there is nothing dishonourable in it, nothing that I am afraid to talk to God about. There are people—I think I am not wrong when I call them my enemies—and it is of the greatest consequence that I should not be traced. You are so very kind, and you look so good and motherlike, I am sure I may trust you."

"And so you may, and I won't worry you no more, and whatever happens I'll stand your friend, or my name ain't Peggy Tibbs, only I was christened Margaret, but my man, that's at sea, he always called me Peggy, from the first day we kept company, and that's many a year ago. Poor lamb! I hope the Lord will be your friend, and then ye needn't be cast down. Now, I won't ask no more questions; only, there is *somebody* in London for ye to go to, when ye get there, I hope?"

"Yes; I have a good, kind friend to go to, a respectable married woman, and she will lodge me under her roof. She has known me all my life, and she knew my parents. But I must work to keep myself."

"Ah! I am right glad ye have someone to take care of ye. For ye are a bit of a thing, and look very young, and if ye ain't axactly pretty, ye have a very *taking* way with you. And London's a dreadful wicked place, full of pits and snares. Ill betide the girl that walks London streets without a friend! There are places, my dear, where even virtue and innocence are no safer than lambs in lions' dens; so take care. I'd not like ye to come to harm."

"Please God, I will come to good, and not harm. But virtue has a stronger power than many people think. You never read about Una and her Lion perhaps?"

"Never! Is it a true story? Won't you tell it me? I do like stories—good ones, above everything."

"I am afraid I could not tell it now. I ought to get up and wash and dress, and get ready for going on board. But I promise that if ever you and I meet again, I will tell you the beautiful story of 'Una and her Lion.'"

"That's a bargain, then! And now I'll go and get ye your tea downstairs. There's water and soap and a clean

towel, and I've brushed yer gownd where it was dirty round the bottom, so I'll go and leave ye to make what the French call your *twilight*."

Clarissa could not but smile at the good woman's French rendering, and she made her "twilight" with revived spirits. Surely, people were very kind to her! Then she had her tea, which she quite enjoyed, and then, as it was growing dusk, and Joe might be expected any minute, she took out her purse, and asked Mrs. Tibbs what she had to pay.

"Pay!" exclaimed Peggy; "not a stiver! Do ye think I'd take money from such as ye, my dear? As to what ye've had, ye are right welcome—just a bite of meat, and a taste of vegetables, and a cup of tea! I shouldn't be worthy to be called a Christian if I wanted to be paid for that. So put up your purse, dear miss, and don't say another word."

"But, indeed," urged Clarissa, "I came to you like any other wayfarer. I should have gone to an inn, only I was afraid, and I wanted to be quiet, and I have no right——"

"Tut! tut! you've all the right in the world. To-day it's my right to give, yours to take. Some day, perhaps, it will be just the other way. Now, my dear, don't vex me; the Lord sent you here, and told me to be a mother to you while I had the chance; and don't I know who it was said, 'I was a stranger, and ye took Me in.' It's no good our calling of ourselves Christians if we don't do as Christ did. That's *my* religion."

"And the world would be a happy place if it was everybody's religion, and what you offer me in that holy and blessed Name I cannot refuse. But I shall never forget your kindness; it has done me more good than even the good food and the comfortable rest. I feel quite hopeful now, and when I entered your house I was almost in despair."

Before Peggy could answer through her tears, Joe rushed in, exclaiming, "Now, miss, the *Mermaid* is all ready, and the skipper says you must come on board at onst, if you means to sail with he. So please make haste."

"I must go with you to the ship," said Mrs. Tibbs, sticking an old bonnet on the top of her grizzled locks. "I must tell yon captain to look after ye a bit. He's a friend of mine, and an old married man, and he's got daughters of his own. Ye may trust him—he's a Primitive."

Clarissa had no idea what a "Primitive" was, but she felt sure, from her friend's tone, that it must be something very good; and she was quite prepared to respect the captain of the fast-sailing schooner *Mermaid*. They threaded their way through groups of jolly tars, smelling of the salt sea, through regiments of boats, and coils of ropes, and heaps of fishing-nets, and piles of caulking, and bales of goods, and crowds of children, who were evidently half-amphibious; and over all was a fragrance of sea-weed and pitch and salt breezes, tempered by a decided odour of red herrings and tobacco.

Five minutes brought them to the *Mermaid*, which received them—figuratively that is—with open arms. The Captain and Mrs. Tibbs were old friends, and Joe was as much at home on board as anywhere, and Clarissa was clearly to be taken into the association without more ado.

"All right," said the Captain, when the moment of parting came. "I'll take care of her, and keep my eye on her, till her friends in London take her in tow. She shall have the best of everything on board the *Mermaid*, though the best ain't much to boast of, I'm afraid. But there's the little state-room at her disposal, and Polly Spratt, my mate's wife, will look after her; and the wind's just right, and the tide in our favour; and I think we are going to have a wonderful quick passage. With a smooth sea, we ought to be in London Docks by twelve o'clock to-morrow. They're a-heaving up the anchor, Mistress Peggy—you must go ashore, if you don't want to go with us to London."

"I shouldn't mind! I'd relish the trip. But what would my lads say when they comed in presently and found no mother and no supper? Good-bye, my dear; God bless ye, and bring ye out of all your troubles, as *He will*—as *He will*, my dear, in His own good time."

"Amen!" cried the Captain, doffing his cap. And Polly

Spratt, who had just emerged from a dark hole that looked like the mouth of Tartarus, exclaimed, "Hallelujah!" from which circumstance it may be presumed that Mistress Spratt was also of the Primitive persuasion. It was all new to Clarissa; but she rather liked the sound of it. Then Mrs. Tibbs kissed her heartily, saying, "And don't forget Peggy Tibbs, of 'Diana Cottage, the Old Quay, Hunsleigh Port.'"

The Captain's predictions were fully realised. The sea was as smooth as the little inland mere at Orwell; the breeze, though cool, was by no means chilly, and the rosy sunset clouds still lingered in the western sky.

"These summer nights are beautiful," said the Captain to Clarissa, when they were well out to sea, and the little town they had left was growing dim and faint in the soft, grey twilight. "That red light yonder won't die out, mayhap, all night—if night you can call it, when it's never dark—not till the Lord sends us the dawn of another day. I often think of what David said, 'Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice!' I can't understand those seafaring folk that have no fear of God before their eyes; no people see so much of the works of the Lord as mariners. 'They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, *these* see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep.' They see Him in the storm and in the calm, in the raging waves and in the placid river with its white houses, and green banks, that leads them safe into port, even unto their desired haven. And this world's a great sea, and life's a voyage, my dear young lady, and the same God that brings the ships safe into harbour will bring those who trust Him safe to their heavenly rest—their desired haven, yonder, far away, we don't know where. 'Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men.'"

And Clarissa could not help joining audibly in Mrs. Spratt's "*Amen.*"

She remained a good while in the comfortable seat the Captain had found for her, watching the still golden line upon the horizon, and its reflection on the rippling waves. As this was only a coasting vessel, and the sea was so

calm, they did not go very far from land, and as it grew dark they could see the twinkling lights of towns and villages ashore; and overhead, the pale stars shone out in the blue transparent sky. Every now and then they saw a light-ship warning them off the shoals which abounded in certain parts of that coast, and once or twice they passed, at some distance, tall lighthouses, from which clear, broad rays, as if from some giant planet, shone out across the waters. It was almost midnight when Clarissa descended to the funny little "state-room" appropriated to her use. She lay down without undressing, thinking she would not be able to sleep; but the rocking motion of the vessel, and the lapping of the water against the sides, soon lulled her to peaceful slumbers, which lasted till another morning's sunshine sparkled on the sea.

By-and-by the schooner slackened her pace, and just as Clarissa arrived on deck a boat came alongside, and there was evidently some business to be transacted. That over, the boat and the rowers went back to the spreading town from whence they came, and the Captain informed his passenger that it was Harwich, whence a great many vessels sailed for Dutch and German ports. "We ought to have been farther on our way," he said. "We should have made Harwich an hour ago, but we were pretty well becalmed all night. However, there is a fine fresh breeze springing up now, that will waft us up the river fast enough. And first thing, you must have your breakfast. Ahoy there! Polly Spratt, just see to this young lady's rations, will ye?"

Clarissa half expected sea biscuits and something which was called "salt junk," with a possible offer of "grog;" but in a quarter of an hour, when Mrs. Spratt, acting as stewardess, summoned her to the meal, she found quite a dainty set out of hot coffee, toast, eggs, and potted meats—to say nothing of kippered fish and two large saucers of preserve! There was enough breakfast for half-a-dozen people. Clarissa supposed she had a sea-appetite, for she never remembered having tasted such delicious toast, such eggs, such fish! As for the coffee it was ambrosial, and Mrs. Spratt informed Clarissa that it was made French fashion, and that she learned the way when

she was at Nantes, and at Bourdeaux, and at Marseilles, years and years ago.

"You have been in France a good deal, then," said Clarissa.

"My dear," replied Polly, confidentially, "I've been pretty nigh all over the world ! and I know the coasts of many countries as well as our skipper himself do. Where my man goes I go. I've sailed with him ever since we married, and that's very near upon eight-and-twenty years ago. We never had any family, so we've kept together on the water as well as on the land. I stayed ashore once, while my husband went a pretty long voyage, but I had quite enough of it ; I never let him sail without me again. I've been with him to Japan, and to China, and to St. Petersburg, and to Constantinople, and to the Cape, and to New Zealand, and to the West Indies, and pretty near *everywhere* ; and I've found out that the world's a biggish place, and that there's lots of good folks in it that don't know a word of English. It makes one liberal-like to travel, that it do."

While Clarissa breakfasted, and talked to Mrs. Spratt about many things — among them the *Primitives* — the schooner was proceeding on her way, at—I dare not say, not being nautical, how many "knots an hour." Indeed, to confess the truth, I am not at all sure of the relations between miles and knots, so I will not attempt to chronicle the speed of the *Mermaid*, as her prow cut the water on that pleasant summer morning. Suffice it to remark, that when at last, after a long talk, Clarissa went up on deck again, they were no longer on the open sea, but in the mouth of the river, with a clear coast-line on either side of them.

And by-and-by the shores drew nearer together, and the river gradually narrowed, and the Captain and his crew, Mrs. Spratt included, began to be very busy. The Captain, however, found leisure from time to time to point out to his passenger certain places as they passed, and they now went much more slowly, for the tide was running in rather heavily, and the river was full of vessels and boats, and all sorts of craft, from the splendid merchantman to the little wherry. It amused Clarissa to watch the men drawing in

the sails, and to listen to the queer language in which orders were issued and answers returned, and she liked to look at the banks, especially as they drew near Limehouse, and forests of masts and rigging rose up on either hand.

"And those are the West India Docks, miss," said Mrs. Spratt, who had finished doing something to a huge coil of rope; "and there's Rotherhithe on the other side. And now we are just into 'The Pool,' and soon we'll come to Shadwell, and then to Wapping, and after that it's nothing to the dock, and it's a very fine voyage we have made, bless the Lord!"

But as the vessel approached its destination Clarissa began to feel nervous again. She had felt so safe and comfortable on board the *Mermoid* that she thought she would like to make a little floating home of it, as Mrs. Spratt and her sailor-husband did. That could not be, however, so she tried to prepare herself for any emergency that might arise, fervently hoping that Fancy would be on shore to meet her, as she had promised Sweetie.

"I ought to be ashamed of myself," thought she, "having these misgivings and fears, when I think how I have been cared for ever since I left Orwell Castle yesterday morning. All has been made plain for me, and the way prepared, and such kind friends raised up! The carrier was kind and respectful, Mrs. Tibbs was more than kind, and I shall always love this dear old Captain, and remember Polly Spratt. Of course, God put it into their hearts to be so good to me, and they are all His own people, that is, all but the carrier, and I am not sure about him, in the sense I mean. Dear me, I am forgetting to pay!"

But the Captain was as inexorable as Mrs. Tibbs. "Bless me, no! Why should I take your poor little money?" said the good man. "You are very welcome to your passage, and to all you have had, and I only wish I could have treated you better, I do. But, you see, this ain't a passenger vessel. I only carry a friend now and then, and should be ashamed of myself if I ever took a fare; indeed, I don't know whether it would not be illegal to convey you for payment, and you wouldn't like to get me into a scrape, now, would you, missy? And if ever you want to

go back again I'll be most proud to take you. Drop me a note at the address I'll give you. I always put up at the same house in Wapping, and what's sent to my good landlady always finds me first or last."

A few minutes later they landed, and Clarissa looked anxiously around her. Yes; there was Fancy. No; was it? Another moment, and Clarissa was locked in Fancy's arms, and she felt that she was safe at home, and that her long and hazardous journey was at an end. It had not, however, been anything like so terrible as she had feared it would be.

"Can we walk to your house, Fancy?" asked Clarissa.

"No, indeed, my lady! It's miles and miles to Chelsea, where I live."

"I did not know it was at Chelsea you lived; but, Fancy, you must not address me as 'my lady.' I am Miss Leigh now, Miss Clara Leigh."

"I shall never frame my mouth to it," said Fancy; "but if I must I'll try. We must take a cab for a little way, and then we shall find an omnibus that will set us down at the top of our own street. I am sure you are very tired, dear, and, oh! I dare say you are hungry—you've had no dinner, and it's between one and two."

"I have fared sumptuously ever since I got to Hunsleigh Port, yesterday. I had a breakfast fit for a queen, and I have just been 'obligated,' as Mrs. Spratt said, to eat sundry good things by way of luncheon."

"In that case, we'll make the best of our way home, and have an early tea."

CHAPTER XLII.

HUE AND CRY.

“She was not found;
Nor from that hour could anything be guessed,
But that she was not.”

WE may consider Clarissa as safely established under Mrs. Saunders' roof, in a neat, well-ordered little house, in a certain respectable street turning out of the well-known thoroughfare of King's Road, Chelsea. She had what people who let lodgings generally call “drawing-room apartments”—that is to say, rooms on the first floor; in this case, a sitting-room and bedroom on one level, opening into each other. Accustomed her whole life long to Orwell Castle, or to the family mansion in a West End square, Clarissa at first felt herself rather restricted as to space; but she soon became used to a parlour fifteen feet square, and a bedroom even smaller. Everything was beautifully clean, and scrupulously neat; and Fancy had brought out all her best for the benefit of her dear young lady. But there was, nevertheless, a good deal on all sides that offended Clarissa's refined habits and artistic tastes. The Saunders' had furnished this drawing-room over the shop, and the adjoining bedroom, with a view to “letting;” and they considered that they had successfully combined both economy and effect, when they had laid down a gaudy, many-coloured carpet, that might have vied with the Babylonish garments of ancient days; and a hearth-rug, chiefly conspicuous for huge pink, blue, and scarlet roses, of the size of full-grown cabbages; when they had set thereon a cheap chifonnier, half-a-dozen chairs with hard, horse-hair seats, a horse-hair sofa, with brass mouldings; and a centre table, of course; and when they had placed, by way of ornament, sundry cheap china figures and spill-cups on the chimney-piece.

Fancy, knowing better than her husband what was required, made various additions when her young lady

was expected; but, in spite of all contrivances, the "apartments" looked anything but beautiful in the eyes of their new occupant, who would have preferred better things, even in an advanced stage of shabbiness. The sitting-room, however, had a very fair light for painting, and when Clarissa had unpacked her own effects, had hung up Susan's portrait and two or three small pictures which had accompanied it, had arranged the very few books she had in her possession, together with her work-basket and writing-case, had disposed the furniture a little less formally, and had settled where her easel should stand when she had procured it, she thought the aspect of affairs in general much more promising. Moreover, she determined to put down with a strong hand anything like fastidiousness and discontent on her own part, and to take up most thoroughly and entirely the new, strange life to which she had committed herself—to become Miss Clara Leigh, the poor artist, in real earnest, and sink till better days—perhaps for ever—the high-born Lady Clarissa Oakleigh.

And here, for a short space, we leave Lady Clarissa settling herself in "furnished apartments," and thankful for many mercies, hopeful for the future, and striving hard to cultivate a healthy and, therefore, Christian frame of mind, while we return to Orwell Castle, in order to discover what were the feelings of its inmates when it became known that she had clandestinely removed herself from the scene of her persecutions, and from the proximity of her obnoxious suitor.

Things went very much as Clarissa to herself had prophesied. At eight o'clock on the morning of her flight the ladies Louisa and Selina were still *en-robe-de-nuit*, and clamouring loudly for their sister to come, according to custom, and dress them. The whole staff of nurse-maids refused to do "what was not their work!" At length, the children getting desperate, and beginning to attire themselves, an under-maid was despatched to Lady Clarissa's room to inquire into the cause of so unwonted a delay. The girl came back open-mouthed—"She isn't there; the door is wide open, and the room—all the rooms are empty."

"She has taken one of her long morning rambles, I'll warrant you," said Mrs. Cray. "This isn't the first time she has been late with the children, and I shall just take it upon myself to represent to my lady that I can't keep proper order in the nurseries if there is to be irregularity. Besides, it's not respectable, a young girl like Lady Clarissa wandering about by herself, the goodness knows where and with whom! And it can't be healthy, going trapesing through the grass before the dew is dried. It's not a week since I heard of her a mile away from home, and the clock had not gone five. My lady ought to know."

"Perhaps," argued one of the under-nurses, "she has gone out with Mr. Chatters?"

"Not she," returned Mrs. Cray, scornfully; "it's my belief she hates that young man like poison, and how she ever got engaged to him, as they say she is, is more than I can understand! No! no! it isn't Mr. Chatters that takes her out of her bed, before it's well daylight—there's someone else, I think, though I don't know who. But I tell you what, Bell, you had better set to and dress the young ladies yourself; there will be a fuss if they are kept waiting any longer."

And while Bell attended to Louie and Selina, who were both very cross at Clarissa's supposed negligence, Mrs. Cray and her satellites wondered garrulously who the young man could be, with whom, to Mr. Chatters' injury, the culprit was accused of taking her walks abroad. But as Lady Clarissa had scarcely ever spoken to any young man in the neighbourhood, they found it impossible to pitch upon any especial person, the curate being a married man, and the organist, who, at one time, gave her lessons in music, living at a distance.

And the little girls were dressed, and what was termed the schoolroom breakfast was announced, and Clarissa, the usual president over the bread-and-milk and new-laid eggs, was still absent without leave.

"She must have gone a most tremendous way," the nursemaids remarked. Louie suggested that she must have lost herself; and Lina lisped, with her mouth full of bread-and-milk, "P'aps poor Clary is tummelled into the water adain!" And then Mrs. Cray said, if she did not come in

soon, someone had better go and tell Mr. Chatters, and really my lady ought to know at once! And the nurses, in chorus, assented.

Breakfast being over, Mrs. Cray called Mademoiselle Coralie to counsel. The servants really began to imagine that some terrible accident had befallen Lady Clarissa, and they were anxious to divide, as far as possible, the burden of responsibility. Coralie sniffed, and turned up her nose, and answered crossly, "Well, and what if the *pauvre miladi* did choose to make a long promenade, what was it to anybody? M. Chattaire? No, indeed! he was still in his own room, and *milord* and M. Oakleigh had just gone up to him to give him some *cold peeg*! And *miladi* herself had had a cup of tea an hour ago, and she had commanded not to be disturb, till she did make ring her bell."

But for all her vehemence, Coralie privately thought it rather strange, and she determined to go to Lady Clarissa's room, and see if there were anything unusual to be observed. So, after declaring that she neither would nor could disturb the Countess, nor permit anyone else to approach her before the summons came, she left the nurses to their gossip, and went to make her observations. The quick eye of the Frenchwoman at once perceived that the room had not quite its accustomed aspect. She opened one or two drawers, and they were partly emptied, a good deal of linen was certainly absent, and at least three dresses appeared to be missing from the pegs where they were wont to hang. Then Coralie went into the sitting-room, and lo! Miss Shrosbery's portrait was gone, and some other pictures, many books, and all the painting apparatus, save the easels, and sundry other articles belonging to Clarissa.

"She has gone, runned away! made what is called the elopement!" said Coralie, throwing up her hands. "Me, —I blame her not! I only do wonder she has stayed so long to be insult, and persecute, and badly treat by nearly everybody in the house! *Pauvre petite*! But I hope no harm will happen to her. May Our Lady and the dear saints preserve her; for she is good—yes, *vairy* good! But it is bad for the young girl to be out in the world

without one protector, and they will say most evil things of her if she is really gone. *Pauvre miladi Clarisse!* Shall I go to the Countess? What for should I go? I will not be the one to set the hounds upon the hare! If she have anywhere safe to go to, I hope they will never find her. Ah! now I know why she look so pale and so sad last night."

Thus it came to pass that it was between ten and eleven before Lady Orwell heard of her step-daughter's disappearance, and then she was informed, not by Coralie, but by the young Earl himself, who, having listened to the nursery comments, rushed straightway to his mother's room, shouting, "Ma!—I say, ma!—what do you think? Clarissa's gone! and Chatters thinks she has cut and run!"

"Clarissa gone? What do you mean, Orwell?" inquired the Countess, with a yawn, and only half awake. "She has taken a walk, no doubt."

"Yes," replied the boy; "but she went out a long time ago, and she is not come back, and Louie and Lina had breakfast without her, and Chatters says he knows she has *mizzled*."

"What time is it?"

"Going on for eleven."

"Find Coralie, and send her here this moment;" and Lady Orwell pulled violently at the bell. Coralie answered it with all despatch; she had seen Lord Orwell enter his mamma's chamber, and she quite comprehended the loud and violent ringing a minute afterwards.

"What is all this, Coralie?" demanded her ladyship. "The Earl informs me that Lady Clarissa is missing. What does he mean?"

"Miladi Clarisse went out for her usual *promenade de matin*, and she have not yet return, that is all, miladi," replied Coralie, innocently.

"But she ought to have returned," said Lady Orwell, imperiously; "the children must be waiting for their lessons."

"*Mais oui!*" was Coralie's cool response, with a shrug of her shoulders that might mean anything.

"Dress me as quickly as you can. Orwell, go and see

if your sister is come home; if not, you and Chatters had better look up and down the park a little. And she once hid herself in the oak-copse, I have been told. Make haste, Coralie, any dress will do, and never mind my hair. Give me my new morning-cap. There! that will do; don't fidget me."

In an indescribably short time the Countess's toilet was completed, and she was ready for action. It was now rumoured all over the Castle that Lady Clarissa had *run away from home!* Chatters was sent for, and he appeared with a very sulky air; he was quite convinced in his own mind that the victim of his persecutions *had* run away, and that to escape the annoyance of his unwelcome addresses. He had nothing to say, except to confirm the news, and to urge that the fugitive should be at once pursued.

"I will go to her room," said the Countess, rising suddenly; "there will be something there to tell tales, if, indeed, she has been shameless enough to elope." And thither her ladyship at once repaired, followed by Chatters, Lord Orwell, and several other persons. It was immediately apparent that many things, particularly in the sitting-room, had been removed.

"Yes! she is gone, sure enough!" said the Countess, sitting down in her agitation, where, in calmer moments, she never would have seated herself—in Susan's rocking-chair. "See! the pictures are removed, and Susan's desk and things, and the painting-boxes, and nearly all the books! And the wardrobe and drawers are pretty nearly empty! How could she have got them away? Some of the servants must have helped her. Whoever dared to do so leaves my service characterless, this very hour. Call the housekeeper! Summon every domestic to the dining-room. Where is Mr. Thompson?" Of course, neither the Countess nor any other person could have the remotest suspicion of the property stowed away in the great chest up in the haunted attic. The silent removal of the books and pictures and other heavy articles was, therefore, an actual mystery, and it was only natural to imagine that Clarissa must have had some accomplice in her flight. But, of course, every servant strenuously

denied the imputation, not one of them having guessed, even remotely, at the young lady's intentions, though the housemaid, in whose charge the rooms were, confessed to having missed Miss Shrosbery's portrait two mornings before; but, as she remarked, she thought nothing of that: she did not know but what the Countess herself had ordered its removal! It was impossible to find out a criminal who did not exist, and though several of the maids were in some sort suspected, the stigma of guilt could not be affixed to any one of them. And, meanwhile, Clarissa was well on her way to Hunsleigh Port, being cruelly tormented by the jolting of the carrier's cart.

"I should not wonder if old Nurse Barlow don't know something," muttered Mrs. Ginger, the housekeeper, as the assembly was breaking up, and the Countess caught instantly at the idea, and went at once in person to interrogate the poor old woman. Both Mrs. Sweetapple and Clarissa had judged wisely in withholding confidence from nurse; it was well for her that she could plead unfeigned ignorance. As it was, it was bad enough to be questioned, and cross-questioned, and threatened, and almost bullied on such a subject, and she wept sore when at last she fully comprehended the true state of the case. Her nursling was gone, no one knew whither; cast, probably, helpless on the world, and she would never see her again! Nothing was to be gained by continuing to harass the poor old lady, and so she was left to her tears and lamentations.

The next thing was to make inquiries without the house, to ascertain whether any of the lodge-keepers had seen the fugitive pass the gates that morning; and as no one at the Water Lodge had observed her, the answer returned in every case was a simple, but decided negative. Next, the villagers were put under examination, and with no better result; no one had seen Clarissa beyond the boundaries of the park since a certain day, when she had gone through the village with her little sisters and "Mr. Oakleigh." Of course, she had somehow made her way to Ipsley, but upon inquiry being made it could not be discovered that any vehicle of any description, from a post-chaise to a wheelbarrow, had been hired at Orwell

Magna that morning, and all the Countess's own equipages were safe at home in the coach-houses and cart-sheds, except those which were in the fields at that very moment. "And yet she could not have walked to Ipsley, the distance was quite too great."

"I don't know that, my lady," interposed the vexed and angry Chatters; "she is a grand one at walking; she would beat many a man upon the road. She is more like a milkmaid than a young lady of title, and I've said so many times. To Ipsley she is gone, you may be certain of that; she would take the coach there, of course. I dare say she is upon the road now. If we took a pair of fast horses and a light conveyance, we might overtake her yet."

Lady Orwell caught at the notion. "If we only knew at what time she left the Castle!" she reflected. Then aloud she said to Chatters, "You see, if she set out quite early, say before six o'clock, she would be well ahead of us by this time. It is almost twelve now—one could go a long way in six hours."

"Yes, my lady, if one walked straight on without stopping, which I am pretty sure Clarissa could not do, although she is almost as strong as a trotting pony. She would get along briskly enough for a mile or two, perhaps for three or four, and then she would be tired, and begin to lag. And by nine o'clock the heat would be overpowering on the high road, and there's very little shade after passing that fir-wood beyond Rushmeads. She would be obliged to rest herself, and after that she would go slower and slower, till she was dead beat. At any rate, we might catch her at Ipsley; she would certainly be too late for the morning coaches—unless she started in the dead of night, directly the house was quiet—and the evening coaches don't leave the town till between seven and eight. We could be there before four o'clock if we lost no more time. But I thought your ladyship said she had no money?"

"She had none that I know of! I never gave her a sixpence, and what she had when my dear lord deceased must have been long ere this expended. But I cannot tell whether Susan Shrosbery did not give her something

handsome before she died. And she has a hundred and sixty pounds lying at the Hadfields'; but she knows nothing of that—I took care she should not—it would only have made her more uppish, and more difficult to manage. No! all things considered, I should say she has *very little* money in her possession, and as she has no idea how cash flies in travelling, even with economy, I should not wonder if she found herself suddenly at a dead lock, for want of needful supplies."

"Serve her right; she had no business to take herself off, with never a word to anybody. Had we not better start at once?"

"Certainly; do you go and order out the fleetest horses and the light phaeton, and while they are getting ready we will eat a mouthful of luncheon. I don't despair of catching her ladyship; and if once I get her back, she will not run away again in a hurry, I promise her. It is casting a reflection upon *me*—eloping in this strange way—but, of course, the scandal will be and shall be all her own."

"She is alone, I suppose?" said Chatters, a sudden idea striking him. "There isn't anybody else—anybody she would run away with?"

"If there is, she is more artful and cunning than a fox! Still, if we don't find her, and if people say she must have had a companion, and all that, you know, Chatters, I sha'n't take the trouble to contradict it. If she chooses to ruin her character, she must. I had provided, as I hoped, a suitable match for her—I meant you to have a portion with her, as you know, and, therefore, I am not to blame. The world must know her for what she really is, and that is irreclaimably stubborn and vicious. I am very sorry my dear lord's daughter should so disgrace herself, but I can't help it. And such an example to my own sweet lambs! I think I am very much to be pitied."

"Let's set off!" cried Chatters, impatiently. "If we can only get hold of her, she must be made into Lady Clarissa Chatters before she is many days older; then she will be safe, and not till then." Mr. Chatters, though not at all in love with Clarissa, had no mind to lose the promised "marriage portion," and also certain Church patronage, on the strength of which he was taking *holy* (?)

orders; nor did he like the idea of relinquishing a *titled* bride. Altogether Clarissa was a most eligible *partie*, and he determined to secure her at any cost—if possible. Once his wife, he could humble her “cursed pride,” and pay her out for all the insults she had heaped upon him. “Ah! my lady,” said he, as he crossed the stable yard, “only let me have you fast, and then I won’t be long in bringing you to your senses; it will be my turn then—heigho!” Happily for Clarissa, this was an absolute case of—“*first catch your hare.*”

They went to Ipsley, the Countess and her worthy *protégé*, and they made inquiries all along the road, but of course gained no information. At Ipsley they got upon a false scent, but were soon undeceived; it seemed almost certain that Clarissa had not that day been in the town. Chatters persisted that she must be still on the road, and as they returned search was prosecuted in every place where it was at all likely she might be in hiding or taking rest. All in vain. When late, at night these worthy inquisitors reached Orwell, Clarissa was peacefully and trustfully watching the stars from the deck of the *Mermaid*, under the fatherly care of good Captain Brown.

But it would fill a volume to recite all the doings of Lady Orwell, Mr. Chatters, and their coadjutors, as day after day they continued their fruitless search. No one ever thought of Cottleby, and, strange as it may appear, no one dreamed of such a thing as questioning the Orchester carrier; and if he had been found and interviewed, the clue would have ended, probably, in the inn-yard at Hunsleigh Port, where he set Clarissa down. Even if she had been traced on board the *Mermaid*, the thread of discovery must have snapped short at the dock where the schooner landed crew and passenger. Captain Brown did not know Fancy, nor where she lived, and, in fact, he scarcely noticed her, being satisfied that his charge was safe under the protection of a respectable person of her own sex.

The Countess did think of Mrs. Sweetapple; but it was one of Sweetie’s *very* deaf days when she visited her, and her interrogator was very quickly baffled. Martha could truly declare that she had not seen Clarissa on the

day of her evasion, nor could she possibly say where she was gone! What did my lady think of her going to Paris, to Madame Pierrot? And there were some friends of Miss Shrosbery's at Edinburgh that Lady Clarissa used to talk of; was she with them? It seemed unlikely; but the Countess wrote to Madame Pierrot, and to the Edinburgh ladies, whose address she managed to procure; but neither France nor Scotland knew aught of the fugitive Clarissa. Dr. Hammond came under suspicion, and he rather enjoyed it than otherwise, and amused himself by tantalising Chatters, and uttering dark sayings when cross-questioned by Lady Orwell. On the whole, the Doctor was the person most suspected of being in collusion with the poor lost girl. Her disappearance was a nine days' wonder, of course, and, like other wonders, it ceased after a while to afford more than mere passing interest. Not the smallest clue could be obtained, and it was whispered in many quarters that she no longer lived—since only a ghost could have vanished thus mysteriously, without leaving some sort of trace behind. And, in fact, Lady Orwell did have the Mere dragged, and, to her infinite relief, without result.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MISS CLARA LEIGH.

“How full of briars is this working-day world;
The night is long that never finds the day.”

It was some weeks before Clarissa could set to work in real earnest. When once she found herself in safety, when once the need for action and effort was over, she relapsed into a state which very much resembled illness, although she did not appear to suffer from any decided malady. It was simply a case of overwrought nerves, induced by ex-

cessive mental and physical excitement, and consequent fatigue. A less healthy person would have succumbed earlier, for the strain upon her powers had been in every way tremendous. The annoyances she had suffered ; the persecutions she had so long endured with a bravery at which she herself wondered, now that they had ceased ; the constant burden and worries of her unsatisfactory and continual nursery duties ; the contrivances to which she was obliged to resort, and the ever-present dread of discovery, under which she lived from the first moment of the escape being planned till she found herself on board the *Mermaid*, with about a mile and a half of sea between her and the land ; even the long morning walks to and from the Woodland Lodge, followed by busy, anxious days ; and lastly, the journey, which, favourable as it had been in many respects, was still a tremendous effort—had all combined to exhaust her energies and prostrate her strength of body and of mind.

At first she could not sleep, and the want of refreshing slumbers naturally increased her feverish weakness and irritated her nerves ; her appetite failed her to an extent that alarmed the faithful Fancy, and she seemed little inclined to exert herself in any way, though she was perpetually distressed at her own indolence, as she called her weariness of brain and limb, and continually chiding herself for her lack of interest in the ordinary pursuits of life, well aware as she was of the necessity of exertion now that she had voluntarily assumed the entire responsibility of her career, and placed herself in a position where she had only her own resources to rely upon. When, however, she could sleep the difficulty was to remain awake, and it was not till she had passed several days as well as nights in almost unbroken repose that nature, having taken her revenge, permitted her to rally.

At last she began to prepare for work, and the very sight of her brushes and palettes did her good. She procured an easel, stretched her canvas, determined on a subject, and, without any more delay, set about her charcoal sketch. Once having made a commencement, she worked with a feverish energy that alarmed her young protectress, who knew perfectly well what must be the end of unrea-

sonable and unvarying labours ; and after some persuasion Clarissa, perceiving that she was making a mistake, and also that everything depended on her keeping in good health, consented to give herself more leisure, to go out oftener, and to paint so many hours a day, and no more, however strong her desire to continue at her easel.

“For,” said Fancy, “it stands to sense, my lady—oh dear ! I mean *Miss Clara*—that nobody can go on work, work, work, without proper rest and recreation, and, above all things, exercise in the open air. I have learnt a few things since I was married, for my husband is very wise and studious in what he calls the needs of the body, and it’s as good as a lecture to hear him tell how the body and the mind mutually assist or injure each other, and how the body must be sound and healthy if the mind is to work well and easily ; and it’s as good as a sermon to hear him preach up *the duty* of attending to our bodies as a real religious duty, that Christian people owe to God as well as to themselves. My Will is no common man, Miss Clara. I thought when I first became his wife that he was a bit too bookish, but I don’t think so now, for he never neglects his business for reading, and the books he studies are all good ones, and he learns most wonderful things out of them, I can assure you. Well, one thing he insists on is daily exercise in the open air, that the lungs may be filled and the nerves braced by what he calls *pure oxygen*—whatever that may be ! Now, Miss Clara, you have scarcely been out at all since you came to Chelsea, and there are such pretty lanes about, where you can get a nice walk—to say nothing of the river-side, and the lanes about Old Brompton. There are cedar-trees, Miss Clara, not far from here, real cedars of Lebanon, that it will do your heart good to look at.”

“Well, Fancy,” replied Clarissa, “I will try to go out a little oftener—every day, if I can muster up the courage. I know you are right, and as painting in oil-colours is not, I am afraid, exactly a salubrious occupation, I suppose I ought to take in a double portion of this oxygen of which you speak. You see, I have never been used to walking in public places unaccompanied, and I feel a foolish kind of shrinking from—I scarcely know what ! for there is

nothing actually to fear ; but somehow, I do not like walking out alone in London."

"And I don't wonder, though Chelsea, you know, is not exactly London, and I am pretty sure no one in this neighbourhood would molest you. Nor, for the matter of that, would you be less safe in the City ; young women who dress modestly and keep themselves to themselves, and go about their business properly, are seldom troubled, I believe."

"And I am not pretty ; I used to be vexed at my plainness, even when I was a little girl ; but now I see how, like every other dispensation of Providence, it is all for the best. Lady Clarissa Oakleigh might have been a beauty and no harm follow ; but poor Miss Clara Leigh, endowed with great personal attractions, would often, I fear me, find herself in awkward circumstances. Beauty would be a more troublesome possession even than a title ! That I can lay down, while my beauty—if I unluckily had any—I should have to keep till I was old, or, perhaps, till small-pox came to my relief."

"As for that, Miss Clara, you are certainly not plain. I think you are pretty, and something more than pretty ; but still you are not one of those wonderful creatures such as I have seen in the park and in Kensington Gardens, with a skin like satin, all roses and lilies, and dressed, oh ! so splendidly. And fine feathers make fine birds, they do say, my lady—that is, Miss Clara."

"Which proves that I must dress as plainly as possible ; and that will suit my purse as well as my position."

"I would always go out with you, Miss Clara, and be proud to ; but there's the shop and the baby, and my girl is but a giddy young thing, and not to be trusted. And then, in the fine evenings Will is never satisfied if I don't take a bit of a stroll with him."

"Very right and wise of Will. But do not trouble yourself, Fancy ; I will begin to-morrow to take my daily constitutional, and as I object to walking without an aim I might do some of your errands for you."

"Oh, my dear young lady ! I could not think of such a thing. Lord Orwell's daughter doing my errands for me ! What would your dear papa say if he could know

that you were demeaning yourself to serve your former nursemaid?"

"He would not think I 'demeaned' myself by doing any useful work. And pray do not speak of the difference between us, in that way. You *were* my nursemaid, certainly, and very kind and faithful you were to me. Since those days, I have been a nursemaid myself, only without wages. I call you *my friend*, Fancy! and I shall never be ashamed of doing anything to help you. Please to understand that, until happier days arrive, or for all time, if it so please God, I lay aside empty claims to rank; I relinquish my birthright as the daughter of a nobleman; I am simply and altogether Miss Clara Leigh—a young woman who has no one to look to but herself, and who must earn her own bread if she wishes to live honestly, and therefore honourably."

It was in the early autumn that this conversation took place, and from that time Clarissa worked industriously, but with some degree of moderation. She never failed, unless the weather was extremely unfavourable, to take her daily walk, which gradually grew longer, and which she enjoyed more and more as she grew accustomed to her surroundings. By-and-by, she ventured into omnibuses, when, as sometimes happened, her errands carried her into the City, or perhaps to Oxford Street, and she found that she could come and go unnoticed, and even tread the busy streets without being exposed to remark, or to any kind of annoyance.

As a rule, respectable women who conduct themselves prudently are safer alone in London than in any other place, provided, of course, they are not abroad at unreasonable hours. And even then, if accident or necessity should detain even a very young woman in the streets and public haunts till later than is desirable, she need not be alarmed. She will scarcely be insulted if she walk steadily forwards, and if her dress and manner generally be modest and unobtrusive. A good and sensible girl may nearly always hold her own, under almost any circumstances.

Thus Clarissa became accustomed, in more senses than one, to depend upon herself; and after awhile, she lost all

sense of fear, and went boldly wherever duty called her. But her dress was always of the plainest, though scrupulously neat, and her grave, thoughtful face, and quiet, composed demeanour, secured her, doubtless, where conspicuous attire and a vain and frivolous air would have exposed her to serious unpleasantness. Fancy grew so habituated to receiving little services from Clarissa, that sometimes now she would even ask her to call and order something from the butcher's; or would she mind going into such a shop, and matching a certain material; or it would be such a favour if she would take her walk Kensington way, and leave a message that Will wanted to be delivered! And Clarissa gladly assented in every case; she felt happier when she could make herself really useful to these kind, though humble, friends of hers.

And when the winter came she found abundant opportunities of rendering true service to the Saunders', for Fancy had another baby, and she made but a very slow recovery, and there were a thousand little acts of kindness she could unobtrusively perform, until she fairly wondered that so much good could be done without spending any money. It was spring before Mrs. Saunders was out-of-doors again, and it was not till she resumed her duties that she even guessed at what Clarissa had been doing on her account. They had news, too, from Orwell during that long and inclement winter; Sweetie and nurse both died, in a severe frost that nipped the life of many a one, and was especially fatal to infancy and to old age. Martha kept up, at wide intervals, a correspondence with Fancy, and Fancy always answered her letters, but in them Clarissa's name was never mentioned. No one could mourn for the good old women, for they had both served their generation, and, like David, fallen asleep, full of years, and ripe for heaven. And yet Clarissa shed many a tear, which she could not repress, over the departure of these steadfast, life-long friends; theirs was the gain, hers the loss, the growing sense of desolation. Fancy and her husband were all that now remained to her on earth, so far as she knew. She had never been to the Messrs. Hadfield, lest they should deem it their duty to acquaint the Countess with her place of refuge. If the old gentle-

man had been living, she would not have hesitated; but she knew nothing of the sons, except that they were in good repute as excellent lawyers, and men of unimpeachable integrity, and how could she be sure that this very attribute of theirs might not constrain them to communicate with her dreaded stepmother? She determined that she would not, if she could help it, put in any claim—if claim she really had—on any legacy, which possibly, only possibly, might revert to her. Not, at least, till she was one-and-twenty, when of course she would be indisputably and legally her own mistress.

But *could* she help going to them? Week by week, and month by month, her finances slowly dwindled. Though the Saunders', without her knowing it, charged her less, far less, for her board and lodging than they would have charged any other person, and though she spent little on herself, her money gradually melted, as it seemed to her. Certain regular payments, however moderate, must needs, sooner or later, exhaust a fund which is never replenished, and Clarissa knew that well enough, and with some anxiety, and a decided sense of depression which she could not throw off, she watched her little hoard grow less and less, till, when the anniversary of her flight came round, there were only several sovereigns remaining. She had her mother's jewels, it is true, and her own watch and chain—her father's last present to her; but it would be inexpressibly painful to part with these beloved relics of the past, and probably for a fifth part of their value!

And what about her paintings? Had she finished nothing, or had she failed to find purchasers for her productions? She was in the latter case. She had worked diligently, and, as she believed, successfully; but not one picture had she disposed of, although she had gone from shop to shop, and tried every place and every person where there seemed even a remote chance of their being appreciated—and *sold*! The utmost she could gain was permission, not too willingly accorded, to leave several of her best subjects on sale or return, on condition that she would not call oftener than once a fortnight to ascertain their fate.

And there they remained, in a certain "Emporium of Art" in Oxford Street, and Clarissa was assured that no one had ever cast on them more than a passing glance, nor had their price ever been demanded. She grew hopeless and sad; it seemed useless to work on and accumulate stock which must remain upon her hands.

Then she tried water-colours, and she threw off with great rapidity a series of pretty sketches, which she thought might meet the popular taste, if she sold them *cheap*. It would be better to earn a few shillings than absolutely nothing, she told herself; for the days were at hand when poor dear Sweetie's gift would dwindle down to the last sixpence, and then she must either go in debt—a dreadful alternative to a mind like hers—or dispose of her jewels, or run all risks and pay a visit to the Messrs. Hadfield, who, after all, had, probably, nothing in their hands which belonged to her.

A few of her sketches, however, did sell, but so few that the products of sale were totally insufficient to meet imperative requirements. What *could* she do? How and when could she find work—that is, *remunerative* work? She was always very busy, but her diligence was, in a pecuniary sense at least, totally unproductive. Nothing that she did—and she was always doing—brought grist to the mill. She began to wonder if she could take in plain sewing, or dispose of fancy-work—at which she was considered very clever, for she had learned from Madame Pierrot several rare kinds of French embroidery, and she had dexterous, nimble fingers and an artist's taste. But for such work expensive materials were required, and Clarissa dared not venture her little all in what must surely be a speculation. She wondered if she could do what was then called "Moravian work" for the shops, and she paid visits to sundry tradesmen, even carrying with her a specimen of her skill, and pledging herself to take all manner of pains, and to complete any tasks assigned her at the appointed time.

But though the piece of embroidery she showed them was certainly superior to any hitherto produced in their establishments, she did not obtain the wished-for orders. One man coolly told her that it was easy to bring a

piece of work and *call* it a specimen. It looked to him very much like something out of a foreign nunnery! How could he be sure she had done the work herself? He had been played that trick before! Another admired the specimen extremely, and seemed content to accept it as her own veritable production; but he had already several regular hands waiting for a job, and trade was so dull, and customers so fastidious, &c., &c. Some would not even look at the cambric she unfolded; others appreciated, but they were overstocked at present. A few asked her address, and promised to communicate should they require "anything in her line."

Clarissa's heart grew very heavy. Then she resolved to try a celebrated *Magazin des Modes*, where, attended by Madame Pierrot, she had more than once been received with excessive deference, and waited upon as if she had been a royal personage. They would never remember her, she felt assured, and they really were such nice people, almost too good for shopkeepers! Yes! she wondered she had never thought of this famous West End house before; it was now four years since her last visit to them as "Lady Clarissa;" they would scarcely recognise her, altered as she was in face, as well as in general appearance.

No, they did not recognise her! It might have been better if they had. She was treated with politeness, but she was at once and coldly repulsed; they were not just then requiring that kind of embroidery, it was decidedly out of fashion; a new stitch was all the rage. In short, they could not possibly at that time give her a commission. She had nothing to blame them for; they were civil and even kind, compared with others, whose rebuff had been harsh, if not insulting; but a feeling of bitterness stole over her as, folding up her exquisite needlework—and she *knew* it was exquisite—she saw none equal to it—she contrasted her present with her past reception. Clearly, the Earl's daughter, stepping from her father's carriage, and attended by an aristocratic French governess, was quite a different person from the humble, shabby Clara Leigh, alone and on foot, making no purchases, and seeking employment almost beseechingly.

At last she did obtain a commission; a piece of work was given her as a trial of her skill. It was a square of the finest cambric, of cobweb-like texture, and it was to be delicately embroidered in satin stitch and open work, to form a *fichu* for the neck and shoulders—low bodies being at that time universally the mode. It took her a fortnight to complete; it made her head ache and tried her eyes. She even sat up at night to finish it within the appointed time; and then she received a sum so pitifully small that she could scarcely believe but that it was a strange mistake. And she knew that the *fichu* for which she was paid a paltry few shillings would be sold for not less than three or perhaps four guineas! In fact, the shopkeeper did sell it at an exorbitant price, as foreign work just received, and a miracle of art and beauty! And the purchaser was the Countess of Orwell.

But Clarissa sought no further orders, for she felt that while she made those wonderful stitches on the gossamer cambric she was sewing her own shroud, and gaining nothing either for herself or for others.

Fancy did all she could to comfort her, and declared that while she had a roof to cover her, and a loaf of bread to eat, her dear young lady should share it; but the Saunders' were not well off. Two more babies had arrived to occupy their mother's time and to absorb their father's earnings, and Fancy was not strong; and Will, though clever, and a good deal of a bookworm, was not very successful in his business. He was steady, persevering, and self-denying; but he did not, as his wife said, "*get on*," and so it came to pass that Mr. and Mrs. Saunders often found it a hard matter to "make both ends meet."

It broke in upon Clarissa's mind, at last, that she was paying for her rooms far less than their just rental; she knew that if the Saunders' let their "drawing-room" to any other person, they would receive almost as much again; she began to feel that she was a drag upon them. and she resolved to leave her present abode as soon as possible. In vain Fancy pleaded, urged, coaxed, and scolded—Clarissa was inexorable. "Don't try to dissuade me, Fancy, dear," she said, and the eyes of both the women were full of tears; "I never ought to have taken

such good apartments, only I was so ignorant, and knew no better; and, then, when I began to suspect how greatly you favoured me, to your own detriment, I hoped that I should soon earn something, and be able to pay you better. I mean for the rooms; I know I can never, *never* repay you for all the kindness and care you have lavished upon me, ever since that day I met you at the docks, more than three years ago! You have been mother and sister and friend to me, Fancy; God will reward you, if I never can."

Fancy burst into tears, and said something about it being no more than her duty, and she should have been ashamed to do less, and so would Will, and she only wished she could have done more; but the children, and the shop, and the untrustworthy servants—there had been a succession of them, for Fancy's "helps" were necessarily youthful and inexperienced—had really so taken up her time that she could not manage as she would. And, indeed, Miss Clara had been almost a servant herself of late! No one but a poor woman with a very limited income really knew the burden and worry of a large little family; and the business, somehow, did not prosper, while expenses would increase. But whatever happened, Miss Clara must not leave them! Will would be broken-hearted if she did, for a talk with her, he said, was worth a hundred pounds to him!

But "Miss Clara" was resolute; she was a woman now—a woman of business, and, in the best sense of the term, a woman of the world,—that is, she had become practical; her girlhood had slipped away from her, and she had learned to estimate things and persons at their real, rather than their ideal, value. And so it came to pass that she moved into humbler lodgings, contenting herself with one room, and that a poor one, and furnished scantily. It comforted her to know that she was not any longer standing in the way of Will and Fancy Saunders.

She did not go far from them—her new home, if such it could be called, was only two streets distant from that in which the Saunders' lived; but she felt very, *very* lonely when the long winter evenings came, and she was shut up in her solitary chamber, amid sordid sur-

roundings, and no friendly voice or smile to break the utter dreariness that pressed upon her with increasing pain and weight. Her health began to suffer, and her spirits sank with her hope lower and still lower—almost to zero. But one spring evening—it was just before her twenty-first birthday—she had one of those sweet, bright hours of communion with God which our Father so often vouchsafes to His children who in their sorest need call upon Him to deliver them in their distress. Something, the Blessed Spirit doubtless, told her that she should “*never be confounded!*” God would help her, and that right early; and inasmuch as she suffered and was cast down, strength should be given her according to her day.

And, in truth, she had reached the crisis of her fate. The morrow was to be the era from which, henceforth, she would date the dawn of a new and wonderful and thrice happy life.

CHAPTER XLIV.

GLEAMS OF SUNSHINE.

“Hope springs eternal in the human breast.”

It was a lovely April day; one of those sweet, golden, fragrant days which spring sometimes borrows from summer, as if to make amends for the lingering icy hours imposed upon her by winter, harsh and loth to abdicate his kingdom, which steal from her the earliest moments of her lawful reign. It was so warm that Clarissa found her linsey dress heavy and uncomfortable. Birds were singing loudly in the pleasant lanes of Chelsea—there were plenty of rural nooks in and about Chelsea at that time—the leaves of the lime-trees were opening fast; the horse-chestnut was spreading its green, wrinkled fans of foliage; the gardens were gay with early flowers and

sheets of plum and cherry blossom, and nearly every window was thrown wide open, as if to let the blessed, happy springtide in.

Clarissa was on her way to Knightsbridge, and she was carrying with her some small, but exquisitely-finished floral vignettes, for which a tradesman had given her a commission. She had only finished them the evening before, and made no delay in taking them to the shop, hoping to receive payment for them immediately, as her purse happened to be—as it too often was, alas!—very nearly empty. She knew exactly how much she had; it did not take long to count it, though it was all in silver coin, for she had changed her last gold piece in paying her rent two days before, and she calculated that with what remained and with what she expected to receive, she would be in funds sufficient to last her for a fortnight, or, with extra economy, for three weeks.

“But, then,” she meditated, as she walked along, “what am I to do for dress? I have spent next to nothing in wearing apparel since I left Orwell, nearly four years ago, and I brought away no great stock of clothing. I have mended and turned, and re-turned and darned, till the things will hold together no longer. I really must go and see the present Mr. Hadfield; his brother has gone out of the firm, it seems. To-morrow I shall be of age, and the Countess cannot pretend to hold me in subjection; nor am I any longer afraid of Chatters. I dare say he is married by this time. Why, dear me! Orwell must be quite a great boy now. I wonder if he is gone to Eton; he will be taught useful lessons there—not to be found in books, I fancy. His schoolfellows will soon teach him that the world was not made for him alone, that mankind was created for other ends than for his convenience, and that carls, though not as plentiful as blackberries, are by no means the *rare æ aves* he imagines them to be. Yes; Orwell must be now in his thirteenth year, and even the baby must be six years old. I wonder if they have quite forgotten their sister Clarissa! But I certainly will find out whether Mr. Hadfield holds any money of mine; I hope I have not forfeited it by not putting in an appearance all these years. Perhaps they

Think I am dead; perhaps Lady Orwell has given out that I am dead. Ah! I am afraid she would be more likely to declare that I had disgraced myself. And now that I know the world, now that I am a full-grown woman, no novice in the difficult game of life which all of us must play, I understand how dreadful, how ineffaceable, any stain of that kind would be. Half my courage, when I ran away from home, arose out of ignorance; though young as I was, and secluded as I had been, I suppose I may call it innocence. At what age, now, does innocence become ignorance? That, I should imagine, would depend entirely upon circumstances; and some poor untaught creatures, exposed to contamination from their birth, can never, never know child-like purity—can never, never be innocent. One cannot live four years in London, as I have done, and not know that.”

By this time Clarissa, who had made quite a circuit, in order to prolong her rural walk and to keep in the shade, found herself approaching the busy haunts of Knightsbridge. In a few minutes she reached the shop which was her destination. The master was engaged, waiting on a lady and gentleman, who were accompanied by a pretty, elegant young girl of fifteen, or thereabouts. The lady seemed to be about thirty-five, the gentleman was evidently younger; they were busy selecting coloured crayons and cakes of water colours, and on the counter lay a scattered heap of drawings, which were, as Clarissa well knew, frequently sold, or hired out to be copied. Not a few of them were the work of her own pencil. The assistant, knowing that her business was with the principal, civilly handed her a chair, and placed before her a portfolio of engravings just received. She was feeling rather tired, and glad of the rest; she seated herself contentedly, not feeling in any hurry, and enjoying the cool atmosphere of the shop, after the hot and dusty street.

The lady who now occupied Mr. Sabine's attention was a gentle, sweet-looking woman, dressed in perfect taste, and having altogether an air of high breeding and refinement. The gentleman was evidently her brother, the younger lady was her niece, for she called her “auntie.”

Clarissa was so interested in the trio, as they talked merrily to each other, and across the counter, that she scarcely glanced at the engravings. The lovely face of the elder lady filled her with delight, and she longed to paint it on ivory; it was a face so good, so kind, so transcendently sweet and fair, while the niece, who was called Adelaide, and sometimes "Addie," was as gay and sparkling as girls of her class frequently are, before they have known even the shadow of care and loss and pain. Presently, they came upon a group of roses—pink, white, carmine, and buff, on a tinted background. Clarissa recognised it as her own production, and she remembered how she had exulted in the beauty her fingers had created; she listened with beating heart to the young girl's enthusiastic plaudits.

"Oh, auntie, dear! oh, Uncle Horace! do look at these roses! Did you ever see anything more natural, more beautiful? Why! they are *growing* on the cardboard! I fancy I can smell them, especially that rich, soft, velvety crimson one; and just notice that *Gloire de Dijon*, and that half-opened mossy bud, and this lovely little bunch of sweet tea-roses! Oh! if I could only paint flowers like these!"

"They *are* splendidly done!" said Uncle Horace; "your praises do them no more than justice: you had better take the group, Addie."

"By all means; but I could never copy it, uncle. I will have it framed and hung up in my own room next to that lovely 'Clytie' that papa gave me on my birthday. But I tell you what, Aunt Emily, if I am to stay with you while papa and mamma are in Italy, I don't see why I should not have some proper lessons."

"Of course, you can have what lessons you like. Perhaps my new governess may be something of an artist."

"I don't want to be taught by *something* of an artist! I want a true artist for my teacher; I want someone who can paint like *that*!—I should like the very person who did paint it. Where is he, or she—I know it's a *she*—Mr. Sabine?"

Mr. Sabine smiled a curious, but not unkindly, smile, and looked towards Clarissa.

She arose, colouring deeply, and, in a tremulous voice, addressed "Aunt Emily": "I should be very glad, madam, to give lessons in any kind of drawing; I would take the greatest pains with my pupils. I have other sketches and specimens of flower-painting here, if Mr. Sabine would not object to your seeing them."

Now Mr. Sabine, though he had always paid Clarissa very poorly, was in the main a kind-hearted man, and of late he had taken a good deal of interest in Miss Leigh, who, in spite of her shabbiness and too evident poverty, struck him as being no ordinary person.

"Certainly, certainly, Miss Leigh!" he said, quickly; "I shall be very happy if I can serve you and one of my best customers at the same time; I have often thought you should turn your attention to teaching—not the elements of the art, of course—but you might give *finishing* lessons to advanced pupils. I shall have much pleasure in recommending you."

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Sabine," returned Clarissa, with evident gratitude.

"You would teach drawing only, I suppose, Miss Leigh?" said the lady, who had scanned Clarissa somewhat closely, while she was engaged in conversation with Mr. Sabine.

"I have not thought about teaching," replied Clarissa. "I *could* teach other things, I believe. I speak French as easily as English, and I am a tolerable Italian and German scholar. I had an excellent governess for many years, who spared no pains in my education."

"Are you anything of a pianiste? Can you sing?"

"I scarcely know how to reply to the first question; I could play once—people said I played well—but it is years since I touched a piano. I can sing, my voice is good, and I studied once under the best London masters."

"Should you like to undertake a governess's duties?"

"I should like it more than I can say; but——"

"But what?"

"I am afraid I am not qualified; I never taught any but very young children; and—and I am afraid I could not furnish such references as are usually required."

"I am sorry for that. But I am sure that it is rather your misfortune than your fault."

"I think I may say truthfully, madam, that it is so. I would speak more frankly if I had the opportunity."

"Will you think the matter over, and call upon me some time to-morrow—about one o'clock, if it will not inconvenience you?"

"I will, madam. Where shall I have the honour of waiting upon you?"

"At Hyde Park Gardens; there is my card."

And Clarissa read upon it the name of Lady Ridley—a name that seemed in some degree familiar; she thought she had heard her father mention it. She left her drawings, saying she would see Mr. Sabine again, for he had contrived to whisper, "If you would go now, Miss Leigh, I might be able to say a good word for you!"

She was no sooner gone than Lady Ridley commenced to question him. "Do you *know* anything of this young lady, Mr. Sabine?"

"I cannot say I actually know her in any other way than through our dealings across the counter; I have employed her for several years—well! it was two years last Christmas since she came to me offering her drawings for sale. She seemed to be in great distress, and seeing, as I did at a glance, that she was no ordinary dabbler in the art, I bought what she submitted to me, and gave her a little commission for some sketches. Since that time I have seen her frequently. She is singularly reserved, even a little proud, I should say—the kind of person with whom few would dare to take the smallest liberty. I have found out that she is highly educated, and I have not carried on my business so many years with people of rank and position without knowing the genuine article when I meet with it; and my own opinion is that Miss Leigh is a *born* gentlewoman, and that she has a *history*!—a very sad one, probably. That she is extremely poor there can be no doubt."

"I never saw a more attractive face," said Lady Ridley; "and I shall be very much surprised if Miss Leigh, in spite of present externals, is not my equal in birth. What do you say, Horace?"

"She is most certainly a lady, in every sense of the word," replied the young man, who seemed about twenty-eight or twenty-nine years of age; "but I should advise you, Emily, to act cautiously. It is a serious affair, introducing a stranger into the bosom of your family; and more than one of your *protégées* have turned out sad failures."

"Something tells me I shall not be disappointed in this Miss Leigh! You know, Horace, I am quick at reading character, and I never read truth, absolute truth, and nobility of mind, in any person's countenance, if I did not read it in hers, when first I looked upon it. *Noblesse oblige* is written upon every lineament, and speaks in every tone."

"I am certain sure she is a darling," said Miss Addie, enthusiastically. "She will tell us all about herself, when she comes to-morrow. I am sure I shall like her, she has such lovely eyes."

"People don't engage governesses for their *beaux yeux* generally, chatter-pie!" returned Uncle Horace, laughing. "Come, Emily, let us be going; we have to be at Chiswick by four o'clock. Here are your roses, Addie; I will carry them."

"My dear, beautiful roses! And I know they will lead up to something delightful."

The next day, exactly at one o'clock, Clarissa was entering Lady Ridley's dressing-room, where she generally spent her mornings. It was warmer than yesterday, and so Miss Leigh ventured to appear in the sole decent dress she possessed—an old black silk, which had been turned and altered and contrived year after year, and yet looked, as Fancy declared, "quite genteel," even now! Clarissa carefully kept it for state occasions, but she thought she should not err in putting it on on so eventful a morning. A strange yearning for rest and peace had seized her; she longed for the protection which as a member of a family she should enjoy; also she felt a passionate desire for intercourse with persons of her own real station, for refined surroundings, and for the atmosphere of culture from which she had been so long excluded. Lady Ridley welcomed her kindly, and rang for a cup of coffee; she

was sure she must be tired after her long walk in the heat. Ah! how long it was since Clarissa had tasted such coffee, how long since she had handled delicate porcelain, and been served from a silver salver! And yet Lady Ridley's house was not so splendidly appointed as was her father's six years ago, when the world knew her as Lady Clarissa Oakleigh.

That coffee did her good; it braced her nerves, which were somewhat shaken; it invigorated her spirits, and gave her time to resume her ordinary composure.

"Now, then," said Lady Ridley, when she had given orders that she was not to be disturbed, "will you tell me all about yourself, Miss Leigh?"

"I cannot;" and Clarissa's face fell. But her interrogator had discrimination enough to discern that it was not the shadow of guilt or of shame that darkened the expressive and ingenuous countenance.

"You may trust me," said Lady Ridley, persuasively. "If you will give me your confidence, I need not say I shall respect it. Is Leigh your real name?"

"It is, and it is not! It is *part* of my name; I have the very strongest reasons for not calling myself by the whole of it. My father died and left me penniless, though he was a man of rank. He quite intended to provide for me, but an accident occasioned his sudden death, while he was yet in the enjoyment of unbroken health and perfect vigour; my mother I scarcely remember. It is through my stepmother I am an exile."

"Does she bring any charge against you?"

"I do not know that she does; and yet I am afraid she speaks very ill of me. She never liked me from the first; but that was, to some extent, my own fault, for as a child, and a most imperious one, I set her at defiance. She stood between my father and myself for some years, and I lived almost apart, with my French governess. It was an unhappy marriage—a mere match for convenience on both sides—and a *mésalliance* into the bargain. My father wanted money, the lady wanted position. When I began to grow up my father's heart awoke, and he turned to me—the only child of a wife whom he had loved—for consolation, and also for companionship. For a little while, till

he died, we were all the world to each other, and my step-mother hated me accordingly, with a bitterness and intensity of hatred which even now makes me shiver when I recall it. I was left at her mercy and in her power, and she made me her servant; I was nursemaid to her children. She persecuted me in every way, and at last, as the final stroke of malice, would have forced upon me a marriage unworthy not only of my name and lineage, but of a pure-minded and honourable woman. To escape from the hateful importunities of a man whom I at once detested and despised, I fled from home, aided by an old servant of my father's, since dead. I came to London, and lived, till about a year ago, with another former servant of the house, a respectable married woman. I had a small sum of money to begin with. When it was gone, I painted, I drew, I tried embroidery, anything to earn an honest living. I am very, very weary of the struggle, and I should thank God, in my heart of hearts, if He saw fit to open the way to more assured means of livelihood. That, Lady Ridley, is all my story; I cannot tell you more."

"But, my dear Miss Leigh, how can you expect anyone to engage as governess—I have three dear little girls—a person who owns to an *alias* or its equivalent, and who refuses to disclose her true name and position?"

"My name I *cannot* tell! As for my position, it must be made, and by myself. Lady Ridley, if you will try me, I think I can promise you most solemnly that you shall not be disappointed. If you will take me, as Miss Leigh simply, I do believe you will never repent the decision. If I show the smallest indication of being other than I have told you; if I display the least lightness of character, or deceive you by one hair's breadth; if, in short, I compromise myself in any one particular, send me away on the instant, to bear the full penalty of my misdeeds."

"There is one thing—forgive me if I seem suspicious—but is there no person who, without revealing names, if it must be so, could confirm the story you have told me? I believe you implicitly, observe; but if I admit you into my family, and consign my dear children to your care, without any warranty, save your own word, my husband

will not be satisfied. I feel strangely impelled to espouse your cause, and to become your friend, but I think, all things considered, I ought to require some kind of testimony beside your own."

"Mrs. Saunders, who was once my nursemaid, and with whom I lived for three years, would tell you that I speak plain, unvarnished truth; but she is only the wife of a small tradesman, and a comparatively uneducated person. Still, her word is as unimpeachable as that of a duchess. Also, the clergyman of the church I have lately attended would, I am sure, testify, in some measure, to my respectability; and—oh yes! I think I *can* send you to some one, who will satisfy you, and yet preserve my secret. Do you know Mr. Hadfield, the celebrated lawyer?"

"I know him very well. He is Sir John's solicitor, as his father was before him. Am I to understand, then, that I may apply to Mr. Hadfield as your referee?"

"I must see him first; I will go to his offices at once, and to-morrow I will let you know."

"How old are you?"

"I am twenty-one to-day. It will be strange if a new life should date from my majority."

"It is a good omen, I hope. Let me wish you all happiness and success, in whatever career may be before you, and may God's blessing be on all your endeavours."

"I cannot thank you enough! I do trust I may be permitted to convince you that I am not ungrateful. If I do come under your roof, I will try to repay you by the diligence and the fidelity with which I hope to serve you."

"Something tells me we shall come to terms. But, do you know, I should have thought you were at least twenty-five."

"My life has been so sad. I was thrown so early on my own responsibility, and even as a child I was often told how old and grave I looked."

"It must make all the difference the kind of life one leads, and I suppose the circumstances of one's childhood do give an indelible tone and colouring to future years. You will let me know to-morrow, then, whether I am to apply to our mutual friend, Mr. Hadfield."

"I will, without fail. But I can scarcely call the pre-

sent Mr. Hadfield my friend, though I have seen him and spoken with him on several occasions. The old man—his father—was indeed my friend ; had he lived, I should have thrown myself on his protection long ago.”

“Is Mr. Hadfield your family lawyer still?”

“No ; my stepmother took her affairs out of the hands of the father, long ago, and the sons—both were in the firm then—were only too glad to be excused from any further connection with a person who would not heed their counsel, and who took offence continually at their plain speaking, and imputed to them dishonourable motives.”

“Very well. It is needless to go into particulars at present ; but I may just say my little girls are ten, eight, and six years old. My niece, Miss Nugent, who was with me yesterday, will be glad to take lessons in painting, and to read and speak French with you, should we conclude our bargain. And as she is quite too young to go into society, she would probably be your companion frequently. There is the luncheon bell. Will you join us? We are quite alone, the children and I. You will need something substantial if you are going at once all the way to Lincoln’s Inn.”

But Clarissa gratefully declined. She wished to be alone ; she felt that she could not just then enter into ordinary conversation, and nowhere could she be more really alone than in a rattling London omnibus, and in the noisy London streets where no one would speak to her, or disturb the train of her reflections. She therefore took her leave, and at once found an omnibus that would convey her direct to the top of Chancery Lane. Once settled in the corner seat, she closed her eyes and thought over all that had happened within the last twenty-four hours, and contemplated the possibilities that were close before her. Her fellow-passengers thought she was asleep.

CHAPTER XLV.

CLARISSA TELLS HER STORY.

Green pastures are before me,
Which yet I have not seen;
Bright skies will soon be o'er me,
Where the dark clouds have been.
My hopes I cannot measure,
My path to life is free,
My Saviour has my treasure,
And He will walk with me."

"WELL, my lady, you have led us all a pretty dance!" said the little, trim, dapper, elderly gentleman who, in answer to the note which Clarissa sent in to Mr. Hadfield's private room, very quickly presented himself. "And where have you been all this long time? And how is your good husband?"

"My husband?" and Clarissa looked amazed. Then she laughed, and said, "I have not the honour of possessing one, Mr. Hadfield. I am twenty-one to-day, and I write myself 'Clarissa Oakleigh, *spinster*!'"

"The Countess told us that you had married some low person; at least, she *hoped*, she tremblingly hoped, it was a legal marriage!"

"The Countess would have forced me to marry a *very* low person. I fled from him as much as from her; I should never have quitted my father's house clandestinely, but for that young man."

"What might the young man's name be?"

"His name was—*Alfred Chatters*!"

"And you ran away from *him*? *You*! Lady Clarissa Oakleigh, the Earl's own daughter, fled from a vulgar, low-born, and—what is far worse—low-minded, base-hearted fellow, like Alfred Chatters?"

"What could I do, Mr. Hadfield?"

"Nobody would have dared to drag you into the Castle Chapel at dead of *night*, as they might have dared two

centuries, nay, even one century ago, and upon pain of death, or the cloister, force you into going through the marriage ceremony! And if you and that fool of a Chatters had been conveyed to the parish church even, no *parvenue* Countess that ever was born could have *made* you pronounce the irrevocable '*I will!*'"

"Certainly not," replied Clarissa; and then she told her tale from first to last, which, of course, need not be repeated here, as it is already known to our readers. When she had finished, Mr. Hadfield said very seriously, "It is a sad story, Lady Clarissa, and young and inexperienced as you were, I scarcely wonder that you took the course you did. But why did you not come to *me*? Surely you might have trusted my father's son?"

"I have thought since that I might. You must forgive me, for I did not know you; and I fancied that you might feel it your duty, if I threw myself upon your mercy, to give me up to Lady Orwell, who, as my father's widow, seemed undoubtedly the proper person to protect me."

"If your father's widow had been anyone but the *quondam* widow Shrosbery it might have been as you apprehended; for I never encourage headstrong young people in their rebellion against the powers that be. But things being as they were, I should simply have constituted myself your guardian, and placed you under proper care, not being myself a married man."

"Will you tell me, as exactly as you can, how the Countess explained my disappearance?"

"First of all, she said you were dead; then, when she feared legal inquiries into the mode and time of your decease—which might have been extremely awkward, you know!—she confessed that you had '*absconded*'—that was how she phrased it; that you had taken with you nearly all your clothes, all your ornaments, and sundry other properties to which you considered you had a right. I at once set on foot a private inquiry, and I traced you to London; I found out that you travelled by sea, on board a small coasting-vessel, commanded by a certain Captain Brown. I lost you at the docks where you landed, but both Captain Brown and the stewardess, a

Mrs. Spratt, assured me that you went away with a respectable-looking young woman. After a while, my lady of Orwell gave it out that you were married, or that you *pretended* to be married! I think I may safely say that no one—even in her own queer set—believed either statement for a moment. As for myself, I went on hunting for you till I was tired and out of humour, and told myself you were not worth any more powder and shot."

"And why did you hunt for me, Mr. Hadfield?"

"*Why?* What a question for your father's daughter to ask my father's son! Have not Hadfields served Oakleighs, and been leal and true to them, ever since the days of Adam? Well! say since the building of the Tower of Babel! It was my duty to look after you, don't you see? Besides, I had it on my conscience that I had not done so earlier; that I had not rescued you from your painful circumstances before affairs arrived at such a crisis. Then I had your money in my hands—poor Miss Shrosbery's little legacy! Why on earth did you not apply for that?"

And again Clarissa had to explain, and Mr. Hadfield had to declare that he had written three several letters, addressed to "Lady Clarissa Oakleigh," at Orwell Castle, and that two of them remained unanswered; that the third, which was couched in somewhat peremptory tones, did elicit a response—as it would appear, from herself—desiring that the money in charge—to wit, one hundred and sixty pounds—should remain untouched, and be allowed to accumulate, till she had reached her one-and-twentieth birthday!

"And, strange to say, I do come to you on my one-and-twentieth birthday! But, Mr. Hadfield, I never wrote any letter to you in my life. Did you preserve the epistle supposed to be mine?"

"Of course I did; such documents are always filed and posted. I can lay my hand on it in three minutes."

Which he did, presenting it to Lady Clarissa for her inspection.

Clarissa carefully examined it, and then returned it, saying, "I never wrote that letter, Mr. Hadfield; I never saw it before. And I never received any letter from you.

I came here to-day simply on the strength of Miss Shrosbery's own assurance that, when all expenses were paid, a small sum, or what seemed so to her, would be at my disposal. I had certain expectations—nothing more. Your letters to me were intercepted, and someone has written in my name to you."

"I expected as much! I was sure of it, but I did not see how to interfere without some communication with yourself. I should like to prosecute *somebody* for forgery."

"Let it pass; it does not matter now. That person's power over me is at an end, nor do I think she will dare further to traduce my character."

"And may I ask what you are going to do with yourself now?"

Clarissa told him, and moreover explained to him in what way she wished that he should serve her. But the grave lawyer shook his head. "No, no!" he replied, "I cannot be a party to any arrangement of the kind. Lord Orwell's daughter going out as a governess! it is simply *absurd!*"

"But Lord Orwell's daughter must live. She cannot starve, she cannot steal, she cannot beg. A princess and a workhouse girl are in the same predicament when it comes to the question of mere maintenance. I have a hundred and sixty pounds, you tell me; it is full two hundred pounds by this time, do you say? So far so good, for I need money for immediate expenses, sorely, *sorely!* But I cannot live on the interest of two hundred pounds. I must secure some kind of income, and I must have a home. I thought it only wise to lay aside my title, which under the circumstances seemed little better than a mockery. A titled woman, with exactly nothing a-year, and the wife of a small tradesman for sole friend and helper!—it was too ridiculous."

"Granted, but it was still more ridiculous to conceal yourself from me. And now you want me to aid you in another irrational quixotic project."

"Mr. Hadfield, am I not now my own mistress? Is there any living person who can exercise the right of control over any of my actions?"

"I am bound to say that there is not. But you have

relations, though distant ones, and blood is blood; and it would be a reflection on your family, and on your kindred, however remote, if you were reduced to the extremity of getting your own living in any dependent capacity."

"I have thought of that, hence I determine to remain simple 'Miss Leigh!' I dare say some of my fourth or fifth cousins *would* give me an asylum rather than permit the world to behold me honourably at work for my subsistence. But it strikes me that I should still be a dependent, and I should still have to render some sort of *service*, being on their charity. I am afraid I am too proud to enact the *rôle* of poor relation with any success; in fact, I had enough of it at Orwell. It would surely be expected, and not unreasonably, that since I could not make myself ornamental, I should—as advertisements say—'be willing to make myself generally useful!' Now that commonly implies a good deal of drudgery, and a plentiful dietary of humble pie; and then one's relations, as a rule, never deem it necessary to pay one for service rendered. Being professedly treated as one of the family, salary is supposed to be out of the question, so that the only thing gained is the preservation of *caste*. Now I have lost *caste* as Lady Clarissa; but I think I may still make a very respectable Miss Leigh, and as Lady Ridley's governess I shall hold a reputable position, and receive decent wages for honest work."

"Did you never hear the name of Ridley before?"

"I am sure I have; but in what connection I cannot recollect."

"It is a curious fact that you should have fallen in with the Ridleys. This Sir John Ridley is the younger brother and heir of your father's friend of old time—Sir Charles Ridley; and it was in his house that the Earl of Orwell first met and loved the beautiful Clarissa Grey, your ladyship's own mother."

"My father told me that my mother, though well connected, was not of noble family; that she moved in a sphere beneath his own; in short, that she was a governess, and that, as such, he wooed and married her. But I do not remember that he mentioned the name of Ridley."

"Nevertheless, Clarissa Grey was governess to Lady

Ridley's little daughters. The Sir John Ridley, into whose family you propose to enter, must have seen your mother often. And do you know that, without exactly inheriting her marvellous beauty, you have grown extremely like her! If Sir John be not struck by the resemblance, I shall be surprised."

"It is very singular. But what you tell me, Mr. Hadfield, greatly increases my desire to secure this situation. Do give me your countenance and assistance. My two hundred pounds, which you have so kindly held and managed for me, seems at this moment quite a splendid fortune; but it will not afford me any sort of income. And as my dear father's sudden death left me without provision, it only remains that I provide for myself. Dear me! persons more nobly born, and better in every respect than myself, have been compelled to earn their living. And there is no disgrace in labouring in any capacity, provided it be an honest one; and teaching little girls of my own order seems to me not only good, but pleasant work. All I ask of you is, that you will confirm the story I told Lady Ridley several hours ago, *mentioning no names*."

"I will see Lady Ridley, and hear what she has to say. My own advice is, that you give her your full and perfect confidence; she is as wise as well as an honourable woman, and you may be quite sure that she will preserve a discreet silence, if you continue to prescribe it. Of course, Sir John must know, but he also may be trusted. I think, Lady Clarissa, that it will be for your interest in every point of view to deal quite openly with these good people; I am sure you will never repent it. Since you must have a home—and that you must, I admit—you can scarcely have a better one than they will afford you."

"But it is surely an absurdity to go flourishing my empty title in the schoolroom?"

"Perhaps so; I have not quite made up my mind on that score; but of this I am certain, that Sir John and Lady Ridley ought to know whom they shelter, apart from any disguise, which may be or may not be defensible."

"I should have exposed myself to suspicion, and certainly to ridicule, if I had gone among the people with

whom I have consorted all these years as Lady Clarissa. Why! some months ago, I was on the point of setting-up a little weekly school at sixpence a-week for reading and plain sewing, a shilling per week for writing, fancy-work, and geography, *without* the use of the globes—twopence a-week extra, for manners, of course! Fancy my sending out circulars, under my true style and title, and imagine my drawing up an account—for I was to have one quarterly pupil—‘Mrs. Muggins to Lady Clarissa Oakleigh, for one quarter’s instruction of Miss Muggins—10s. 6d.!’ Some people would at once have dubbed me an impostor; the more charitably disposed would have accredited me with insanity. The joke would have got into the newspapers, and those from whom I was hiding would at once have discovered my retreat.”

“I do not blame you, as regards the past, Lady Clarissa, though take notice that I consider your evasion a decided mistake. At any rate, if you could not help eloping, all by yourself—and I am not prepared to say you had at the time any other alternative—you ought, as soon as you arrived in town, to have come here to me, or, at least, to have communicated with me, and that without delay. No; the past being irrevocable, let us ignore it, and not waste any more breath in discussing the *pros* and *cons* of what cannot now be altered. But as regards the future, I entreat you to drop the masquerade, so far as regards the Riddleys. If they do not object to receive you, and to introduce you as Miss Leigh, all well and good; but you must not run the risk of inopportune discovery. Hidden in the depths of Chelsea, and meeting only with persons of a certain class, you were not likely to get into difficulties on account of your *alias*; but the neighbourhood of Hyde Park, and the select circle of my Lady Ridley, are *toutes autres choses*—you know! I am sure you must perceive it for yourself.”

“I begin to see that certain *contretemps* are not unlikely to arise; but I have already distinctly stated to Lady Ridley that *Leigh* is not my real name, but only part of it. Still, if you seriously counsel me to reveal all I have concealed to Lady Ridley—and, of course, to Sir John—I will do so.”

"I do seriously counsel entire openness. Let the Ridleys know all that is to be known; there is nothing to be ashamed of, nothing you need hide from them; then they can decide whether or not it is expedient for you, as their governess, to preserve your incognito. When shall you see Lady Ridley again?"

"I promised to see her to-morrow—chiefly to inform her whether you were willing to stand surety for my truthfulness, as regards my story and my general respectability."

"I will write to her ladyship this evening, and assure her that you are most worthy of her regard, that she may with perfect confidence receive you into her family. But I shall leave the disclosure of your real name to yourself, and I shall tell her that I have advised you not to preserve your incognito, as far as she and her husband are concerned. All the rest must be settled between yourselves. Now, about money, Lady Clarissa; is your purse tolerably supplied?"

Clarissa drew out her poor, faded purse, and with a blush and a smile explained that it contained something less than a sovereign, and that she would really be very thankful to receive some small instalment of her legacy as soon as possible.

"Shall I draw you a cheque for ten pounds, or for twenty pounds—or for how much?" said Mr. Hadfield, taking pen in hand.

"I will have twenty pounds, if you please. Woman-like, I am anxious to rush to the linendraper's and the milliner's."

"I should have thought Lady Clarissa Oakleigh was above the petty foibles of her sex."

"Lady Clarissa may be, but Miss Clara Leigh is not! You see, Mr. Hadfield, if I go to Lady Ridley's, I must dress respectably; and seeing that this old gown, which threatens continually to fall to pieces, is the only one in which I am at all presentable, and taking into account the fact that I have not replenished my wardrobe since leaving Orwell—if I except a cheap washing dress or two—and that all my habiliments are in the last stage of hopeless consumption, it behoves me, I think, to take speedy measures for the renewal of my toilet."

"I think so, indeed; I had no idea that you had been so straitened; let me give you thirty pounds at once, and draw upon me for all that you require. You will need a general supply of everything, from bonnets to boots, and money is soon spent when you take to shopping on such a scale."

"Also—I may as well confess it—I have been obliged, in order not to incur debt, to pawn my watch and some of my dear mother's jewels. I shall wish to redeem them as quickly as may be, now that I am so rich."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! to think you should have been brought to such a pass, and I within your reach all the time! Of course, the watch and the ornaments must be redeemed. I will attend to that for you; when next we meet hand over the tickets to me. Now, come and have some dinner. There is a place, not far off, where ladies dine. No, don't refuse; I am not going to let you have your own way any longer. Your face at this moment is nearly the colour of your pocket-handkerchief. Let me see, I had better get your cheque cashed, had I not? You shall have twenty-five pounds in notes, and the rest in gold. You will not lose it, eh?"

"Perhaps I shall. I am so unused to having money in my pocket. But I will take care. I have lost all the country-cousinhood I brought with me to town; I feel like a veritable Londoner."

"Nevertheless, Londoners prey on Londoners, as well as on country-cousins, when they get the chance. Now, then, let us be going. I am hungry, if you are not, and I am sure you stand in need of refreshment."

In the ladies'-room of an establishment such as we should now call a *restaurant*, Clarissa, for the first time for many a day, sat down to a dainty little dinner.

Mr. Hadfield seemed thoroughly to enjoy his repast, but he kept a sharp watch on his companion, and saw that she did not trifle with the delicate little *plats* he ordered on her account, and he insisted on her drinking a glass of good sound claret. The truth was, he felt quite shocked at Clarissa's faded, careworn looks, and the shabbiness of her one best dress, and her only bonnet, touched him to the heart; and as he discussed his

"*sole normande*," he reproached himself that he had discontinued the search for the girl, whom his father would have guarded and protected at any cost or risk. He had always meant to resume certain inquiries, to endeavour to take up the clue which he had been compelled to let fall at the dock where the *Mermaid* landed her solitary passenger, but Mr. Hadfield had not only inherited his father's *clientèle*, but he had added very largely to his practice as solicitor, and his time and thoughts were both very fully and continually occupied. "However," said he to himself, as he sipped his *Chateaux Margaux*, "I will take care not to lose sight of her again. To think of Orwell's daughter wandering about London in this guise! She will be safe for the present under Lady Ridley's care. Don't I wish I could punish that old harridan, her stepmother! I'll do something to pay her out, or my name is not Thomas Hadfield. I wonder if I could frighten her almost out of her senses?—she is such a fool in many ways, and I know a good deal of her history. It would not be very difficult, and I really want something to divert me, by way of recreation."

Clarissa, still crumbling her French roll, wondered what he was smiling at—such a curious, cynical, malicious smile it was. When they left the *restaurant* they walked back to the office, where Clarissa found her magic slip of pink and white paper transformed into gold and notes. Then Mr. Hadfield called a cab, and put her into it, intimating as she drove off that the fare was paid, and that she had only to alight on reaching her destination.

She slept that night as she had not slept for many months; her sleep was sweet and sound, and wonderfully refreshing. Next morning, when she tried to say her prayers, all she could think of was, "Bless the Lord, oh, my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name." And, at the appointed time, she once more donned her old black silk, and resolving to buy a neat, ready-trimmed bonnet on the road, set off for Hyde Park Gardens.

CHAPTER XLVI.

ADELAIDE'S PREVISIONS.

"Her life came to her, hour by hour, day by day, and she never hurried it. She never wanted to meddle with the future. She left it as the sacred, untouched 'to come,' in the hands of God."

LADY RIDLEY met Clarissa with Mr. Hadfield's letter in her hand. It was, as you may suppose, perfectly satisfactory, but he strongly urged upon both ladies the fullest and most entire confidence, and he went so far as to observe that the Ridley family had already been in a certain way connected with that of Miss Leigh, and that Miss Leigh's father and the late Sir Charles Ridley had been close friends many years before.

"Will you not tell me all about it?" said Lady Ridley, when she and Clarissa were again seated *tête-à-tête*. "I do not make a condition of your confidence, but I think it would be so much better for us both if there were no secret between us, and my husband would be satisfied, which I am afraid he might not if there were any reservations. You tell me that *Leigh* is a part of your name?"

"Yes; the latter part. Lady Ridley, my own judgment endorses that of Mr. Hadfield. I think you have a right to know who I really am, and I am quite sure it will be happier for myself that it should be so. My name, then, is Clarissa Oakleigh, and my dear father was the Earl of Orwell. And my mother, once Clarissa Grey, was, as Mr. Hadfield informs me, governess in the family of Sir Charles Ridley. In fact, my parents, I believe, first saw each other at Ridley Park, and the wedding took place in London from Sir Charles' town house."

"You are, then, *Lady* Clarissa Oakleigh?"

"That is my proper style and title, certainly; but I laid it aside four years ago when I quitted Orwell and entered upon a life of humble labour and obscurity. In the first place, I anxiously desired to hide myself from my stepmother and from another person whom I dreaded and

disliked; and I also felt that in the circumstances to which I was reduced, and in the position which I must necessarily accept, any assumption of rank must needs be inexpedient and ridiculous. As regards Lady Orwell and that other person, I think I need not any longer disturb myself—her ladyship cannot now *pretend* to any kind of control over me; and the other person from whose persecutions I fled, I should not fear to meet to-morrow, though, from motives of pure aversion, I would fain never see his face again.”

“This ‘other person,’ I presume, was an unacceptable suitor?”

“Precisely so. If it would not weary you, I should like to tell you the whole story of my life, from my father’s death to the day before yesterday, when we met in Mr. Sabine’s shop.”

“It is just what I am anxious to hear. Addie was right; she said she was quite sure you had a story.”

And then, for the second time within twenty-four hours, Clarissa told the sad tale of which she was the heroine, beginning with Chatters’ arrival at the Castle, and ending, as she had promised, with the interview in Mr. Sabine’s shop. She tried to tell the story as simply as possible, not dwelling upon her own wrongs, nor exaggerating her misfortunes, nor sparing herself in those instances wherein she now felt she was more or less to blame; but just giving the facts as they actually were, and narrating the events with frank and scrupulous veracity.

“I have heard before of Lady Orwell’s eccentricities, to apply no harsher word to her strange conduct. Mr. Hadfield is evidently supremely disgusted with her; he says she must have suppressed letters from himself to you—letters which would have gone far to render unnecessary the retreat which your stepmother speaks of as your *elopement*. But now, my dear, I hope your troubles are ended. I think I can promise you that my husband and myself will be as true friends to you as were Sir Charles and the former Lady Ridley to your mother. Only I do not like the idea of making you my governess; you are more nobly descended than myself. And yet I will not contemplate the prospect of our ever again being strangers to each other.”

"Dear Lady Ridley, I trust you will not let my rank—my empty title, which is a mere accident of birth—stand in the way of my good fortune. I must maintain myself, having neither pecuniary resources nor expectations. The life of a governess will be easy and pleasant compared with that which I have led for many years. It will be delightful to be usefully employed, and to serve those upon whose kindness and steadfastness I can depend. I ask nothing better than to be engaged by you as the instructress of your little girls. God helping me, I will strive to be a blessing to them and a comfort to yourself."

"Very well, then, that is settled; you are to come to me as soon as you can arrange your affairs. But, my dear, though you act as my governess, I shall treat you as my friend and sister. I shall at once let it be known that a friend of mine is about to reside with me, and assist me in the education of my children. I shall not speak of you, nor allow others to speak of you, as *the governess*!"

"You are very, *very* good, and I shall be, I trust, your true and faithful friend. But as I intend to do the work of a governess, I shall not be ashamed of the name of one. And I should like still to be called Miss Leigh."

"Miss Oakleigh would be better, would it not? That would be simply to drop the title, which might be resumed at any time, though I do not see why you should not at once be known to the world as *Lady* Clarissa Oakleigh. You and I have settled our arrangements, and henceforth you make your home with me. That is simple, and quite satisfactory."

"Extremely so; I should deserve future misfortune if I did not feel more than satisfied with the present aspect of affairs; nevertheless, I must, if you please, be known simply as *Miss* Oakleigh."

"And when can you come to us?"

"I think I should like to have a fortnight for necessary preparations. You would not care that I should enter your house with a shabbier and scantier wardrobe than any of your servants. Also, I have a small order from Mr. Sabine to complete."

"Surely you need not any longer paint pictures for the shops?"

"No; but this order was received when I was only too thankful to obtain it; besides, I *promised* Mr. Sabine that certain drawings should be executed by the end of the month. I promised unconditionally, therefore I think I ought unconditionally to perform. Of course, I shall not undertake fresh work."

"You are right—a bargain is a bargain, and a promise, though involving inconvenience, should be kept. Shall we say, then, this day fortnight?" And so it was arranged; and Clarissa returned to Chelsea to impart the great news to Fancy, whom she had not yet enlightened, lest the negotiations with Lady Ridley should end in nothing. Mrs. Saunders was, of course, delighted, and her own rooms being vacant just then, she persuaded Clarissa to occupy them, that she might the more effectually be aided in the preparations she had to make. The fortnight soon passed, and Clarissa, having once more supplied herself with suitable raiment, and having also finished Mr. Sabine's pictures, took up her abode at the Ridleys', and entered on her new and pleasant duties.

She had never been happier in her life. Lady Ridley treated her like a sister. Sir John was kindness and consideration itself. The children were well-behaved, affectionate, and intelligent, and Adelaide Nugent was her friend and companion. Uncle Horace, whom Clarissa soon came to know as Captain Willoughby, was very much with his sister at Hyde Park Gardens, and appeared to like nothing better than conversing with the new inmate, whom his niece Addie assured him continually was "the dearest and charmingest creature in the world!" But neither Captain Willoughby nor Addie knew who Clarissa actually was. They were only told that she belonged to one of the oldest and best families in the kingdom; that she was an orphan, and, through the unkindness of relatives, portionless.

"As if the dirty dross of money mattered," said Addie, one day, about four months after Clarissa's domestication among them, and when they were all together at Ridley Park, including Uncle Horace.

"You would find it mattered very much, Addie," returned Lady Ridley, "if you were suddenly left quite

destitute. You would not despise the 'dirty dross' if you came to be in Clarissa's circumstances; you have not the smallest idea of the value of money."

"And why should I have? I have as much as I want, and Uncle John—that is, for papa—pays all my bills, and stints me in nothing. If I chose to be extravagant, I dare say, I should begin to make calculations, and to be covetous; but I do not think I shall ever wish to exceed my allowance. Or if I do, papa won't mind—he is so generous, and he never scolded me in all my life. It must be awkward, though, to have no money at all, or only just a little that you *can't* make do, and, worst of all, to be alone in the world, without father or mother, or kind uncles or aunts, or any one to take good care of you. Now really, Aunt Emily, I wonder what would become of me if I were left to my own resources. Just fancy *me*, obliged to earn my own living, and without guidance or control!"

"I really cannot fancy it, Addie, and I earnestly hope you will never be in such straits, for I do not think you have Clarissa's high courage and patient endurance."

"And yet Clarissa, I suppose, was in her childhood and early youth as happily situated as I am?"

"No, she was not. But her position in life was superior to yours, and she could have had as little idea of actual poverty as yourself."

"How very religious she is. I don't mean that she is always breaking out into texts and verses of hymns, or bothering you about your soul, like that curious person with whom we lodged at Scalby last summer; but she seems to think so much about pleasing God, and she trusts Him so; and she is so kind and patient, and anxious to do all the good she can, and she is so content to leave her future in God's hands. Now I—who have no real anxieties—want to know what is coming; I feel sometimes as if I must run on to meet the life that is coming to me, while Clarissa is thankful to take her life as it comes to her, day by day, and hour by hour."

"You know *who* said, 'Take no thought for the morrow'?"

"Auntie, I have often wondered what that meant, for if

we interpret it literally, it seems to me that the whole world must get into hopeless confusion. Christ could never intend that we should go on our way regardless of consequences."

"Christ never intended anything that was in the smallest degree unreasonable or unnatural. It was the great charm and power of His teaching that He taught as one who, being Himself man, knew what man's cares, and griefs, or temptations were. That text is very easily explained. You know when our present translation of the Bible was made?"

"To be sure; in the reign of James I.—that most foolish, and self-conceited, and ridiculous of English kings!"

"Well, at that time the word *thought* was often used to express undue care, over anxiety—as the literature of the day proves. Shakespeare uses the word—I forget where—in this sense; Lord Bacon speaks of a man accused of some offence against the State, who, ere the day of trial came, 'died of *thought*'—that is, of dread and excessive anxiety as to the issues of his prosecution. The same expression occurs frequently in letters of the period, especially in those of Queen Elizabeth's secretary, Sir William Cecil. You see words, like coins, vary in their worth as centuries roll on. The penny of James I. was, doubtless, a very respectable piece of money—so much could be purchased with it. A penny now is of little avail, even to a beggar, if it stand alone. Just so, 'taking thought' in the present day means due consideration; in the day of these translators it meant invariably worry and distress of mind."

"I see. I am so glad to know. And that other expression about not being able to add a cubit to one's stature has always seemed to me such a far fetched expression."

"It is an expression due to the ignorance or carelessness of the translators. The Master Himself said nothing of the kind. I am sorry to say I am not such a Biblical scholar as I might be, and I am not quite certain what the true rendering really is; but I believe it is that a man cannot add to his life any period of duration

beyond that which God has assigned him—I *think* that is it, but I will not be positive. Your Uncle John, however, will tell you, for he is an excellent Greek scholar, and, except for family purposes, never uses the common English translation."

Then Addie was quiet, and for nearly a quarter of an hour she stitched silently at her embroidery, while her aunt wrote a letter. But as Lady Ridley lighted the taper to seal her note—for there were no such things as adhesive envelopes, nor, indeed, any envelopes at all, in those days—she burst out with, "Auntie! the most delightful idea has just occurred to me."

"Is it practicable as well as delightful?"

"Quite! I'll tell it to you in confidence. Uncle Horace and Clarissa Oakleigh shall be married! It will be just as good as a novel."

But Lady Ridley looked very grave as she replied, "Really, Addie, you are too old to talk in that wild, rash way. If you breathe one word of such a notion to Clarissa, you would at once disturb all her peace and comfort, and perhaps drive her away from us."

"Aunt Emily, I am not such a simpleton as to speak to Clarissa; I only mentioned it to you in strict confidence."

"Better not mention anything of the kind to anyone! Better not think of it yourself. One careless word, or one oblique hint, might do an infinitude of mischief. There is something, to my mind, indelicate in such speculations."

"Auntie, I did not mean any harm. I only thought how nice it would be to have Clarissa for my Aunt Willoughby. And then they suit so well, and I am pretty sure Uncle Horace *does* like Clarissa."

"Liking is one thing, marrying is another. And they are too poor to marry. I hope they will not think of such an imprudence. Mind you do not suggest it to either of them; you chatter very freely to your Uncle Horace sometimes, you know."

"I do know; but I should never think of referring to anything of that sort. One may go so far with Uncle Horace, and no farther; one may be very frank and free with him, but one must not take a liberty. I know no one who can quench impertinence more quickly by a word,

or by a look, or tone even. But quite between ourselves, aunt, I do think it may be some day; Clarissa has not thought of it yet, but I can't help fancying Uncle Horace has. And would they be so *very* poor?"

"You know your grandpapa is not rich, and Horace is only a younger son, while Clarissa has literally nothing."

"But she may have, may she not?"

"I cannot see how, for she has no near relations in the world who are likely to leave her any money; nor has she any legal claim upon those who ought, but who decline, to make adequate provision for a daughter of their house."

"What a pity; now, if Uncle Horace——"

"My dear, I should prefer not to continue the conversation. You know how I dislike vulgar gossip; and the discussion of probable marriage between two persons who show no sign of discussing it between themselves comes under that head."

And so Addie was reduced to silence; but being a young lady of decided and tenacious opinions, she was by no means internally convinced. Lady Ridley herself could not shake off a sort of latent notion that Addie might be right; she pondered it in her own mind, not even mentioning the idea to her husband. She quietly watched the two, and said nothing to anyone.

And the autumn passed away, and winter once more spread its snowy mantle over the leaf-strewn sward of Ridley Park, and Christmas came with all its hallowed memories and festal joys, and still Lady Ridley was uncertain whether Addie's guess had been a true one. Only, that which at first sight had seemed to her a mere impossibility, was becoming daily more probable and more satisfactory. And one morning, when Lady Ridley had gone to her husband's study to ask some needful question, he said suddenly, dropping the pen in the act of resuming it: "My dear, are your friend Clarissa and your brother Horace going to make a match of it?"

"JOHN!!" Half-a-dozen notes of interrogation and exclamation would not suffice to mark the surprised and almost reproachful inflexion of Lady Ridley's voice.

"Well, my dear, and what is there in that speech to make you look ten hundred queries and a thousand rebukes?"

"Just think of what you are saying. One breath of it would drive Clarissa from Ridley."

"I don't see why it should. Clarissa seems to me an extremely sensible young lady, and if she can't like Horace Willoughby—having no previous attachment—I am sorry for her, and have no hesitation in saying that she deserves to be an *old maid*!"

"You do not think Horace is—in love with her?"

"My dear wife, where are your eyes?"

"In my head, of course; but your tone leads me to suspect that I have not been using them to much purpose lately. Tell me, John—do you *know* that Horace is thinking of Clarissa?"

"I do know it; but whether Clarissa is thinking of Horace is more than I can say! I thought, perhaps, you could tell me that. But seriously, Emily, should you object to Clarissa as a sister?"

"There is nobody in the world I should prefer to her; she is all but my sister now. But sister and sister-in-law are not quite interchangeable phrases, and I think we ought to reflect before we encourage anything between these two."

"I don't see it; I thought for once the capricious deity was going to behave in the most unexceptional manner. It seemed to me a heaven-made match. What would you have? Clarissa is charming and good, and well born, and Horace is in love with her, and has been ever since last April. Why should they not marry?"

"Because they have so little to marry upon."

"I hope my little wife is not growing worldly. These young folks are not rich, and, considering their station in life, they are actually *poor*! But what then? Horace has brains and energy, and a small patrimony, and Clarissa cares little for luxuries, and does not go in for the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, like some fashionable ladies whom I could mention. Besides, she has learned contentment and economy in a hard school."

"You think they might venture?"

"If they love each other, they *ought* to venture. There would be no imprudence in their case. Neither of them cares much, if at all, for fashionable position, or for expensive pleasures."

"Horace will leave the army, of course."

"He is intending to do so, I believe, irrespective of Clarissa's claims. He never liked his profession, as you know; he always wished to enter the Church. I advise him to sell out and embrace the vocation which is so clearly his. I would not so counsel him if I were not sure that he would be the right man in the right place. I always said he was cut out for a clergyman."

"And you have two good livings under your patronage."

"I have, Emily. All things considered, I abominate what is called 'Church patronage,' for I think—I am sure—it is the fruitful source of much that is injurious to man, and displeasing to God. But having two '*livings*'—how well the word expresses the mean fact—in my gift, all I have to do is to bestow them, as a faithful steward acting for a righteous and omnipresent Master. And I know that if I put Horace in Brightlands Rectory, which, in the course of nature, must be vacant in a very few years, I shall be doing that for which I shall not be ashamed to answer at the great settling day. Not but what I count Church patronage an error and an abuse, which will one day pull down, or help to pull down, the National Establishment to the ground. It won't come in our day, Emily, but our children may live to see strange things."

"God forbid!"

"Nay! Strange things may be to God's glory. And I see with my own eyes that the National Church is fast becoming national only in name."

"But God's Church cannot fall."

"Never! But God's Church is the whole Church militant here upon earth, of which we of the Church of England are only a section. God has to do with principles, out of which grow Churches. I am afraid He has little, if anything, to do with systems, out of which grow establishments. Systems have their day, and fade and die when their time comes; principles only are immortal. The Church of Rome is a system; the Church of England is a system. The one, I think, has done her work, and a great work it was, in the old days gone by; the other will do her work to the end, I trust; but both, as Establishments, must perish, even on this side eternity."

Those strong lines, "Our little systems have their day," &c., were not then written, or Sir John Ridley would, doubtless, have quoted them; but I think he had the true conception of them in his mind.

And so it came to pass, that when Addie's previsions were verified, and Horace Willoughby asked Clarissa to be his own dear wife, she consented, knowing well that she would be welcomed by every member of her lover's family. And Addie could not help being the least bit triumphant over Aunt Emily. The young couple would have to wait at least several years, but that did not matter; both were willing to wait, and both had perfect confidence in each other, and in the wisdom and love of God whom they humbly served and trusted.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"SING SMALL, LOO, SING SMALL!"

"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding
small;
Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds
He all."

HORACE and Clarissa were engaged quite two years—two years which to the latter were full of calm, uneventful happiness and peaceful waiting. Horace, as had been arranged, sold his commission, and, as quickly as the necessary formalities would permit, "took orders," or, as Romanists and Anglicans put it, "entered the Church"—as if the priesthood constituted the Church of God. We prefer to say—he entered the ministry. They did not wait for the Brightlands Rectory to fall vacant, but married, with the full consent of the united families of Ridley, Willoughby, and Nugent, as soon as Horace was in full orders, in the June after Clarissa completed her

twenty-fourth birthday, and just after the young Earl of Orwell was expelled from Eton for conduct singularly scandalous and disgraceful.

And leaving Lady Clarissa Willoughby for awhile, we will, with the reader's permission, take a slight review of the state of things at the Castle during the years which intervened. Freed from the presence of her hated step-daughter, the Countess believed that she would dwell in perennial sunshine, and she told everybody that Clarissa had tried her temper, and worried her in a thousand ways, ever since she came a bride to Orwell, till really she must own there came to be bad blood between them; but now, when it had pleased the Almighty to deliver her from her long and heavy trial, she doubted not that her days would be long in the land, and most supremely happy.

Chatters consoled himself speedily by falling in love, and courting the pretty, saucy daughter of mine host of the "Red Cow," whom in due time he wedded, and made as miserable as might have been expected. He, however, could not coax Lady Orwell into giving him the "living" which was to have been his as the husband of Lady Clarissa; and he remained a mere curate till his dying day, forfeiting all chance of preferment by his disreputable conduct, which excited severest disapprobation in a day when immoral clergymen were unfortunately rather too thick upon the ground. Whether it was that the Rev. Alfred Chatters took offence at the Countess's withdrawal from her conditional promise, or whether they fell out—as two such natures were sure to do, sooner or later—on any other score, is more than I have been able to ascertain—the family records, and the old letters which I have been permitted to consult, throwing no gleam of light upon this subject, which, after all, does not interest us extremely.

I only know for certain that Chatters—I beg his pardon, the *Rev.* Alfred Chatters, B.A.—became her ladyship's mortal enemy, and, as far as he could, without damaging his own reputation, spread abroad the story of Clarissa's wrongs, and published, by loud and incessant tittle-tattle—quite in keeping with his patronymic—the account of *some* of the persecutions which had at last driven her to

the desperate step of withdrawing herself from her childhood's home.

The young Earl also commenced at a very early period to overwhelm his mother with painful anxieties, and Mr. Oakleigh and the Honourable Sidney John were not slow to follow the example of their elder brother. While still in the nursery, they plucked the unfledged birds of their feathers; they tortured miserable cats, and tied tin-kettles to the tails of luckless dogs. As they grew older they became the patrons of all kinds of cruel sports, and they seemed to revel in low companionship—never so happy as when associating with some of the worst juvenile offenders in the village. They alternately consorted with and bullied the servants; and it was a very curious establishment, that over which the Countess now presided—such an one as, perhaps, never before nor since has disgraced the ancestral halls of one of England's peers. All the failings of the Oakleighs, and all the vices of the Sparkses, appeared to be concentrated in these unpromising youths, who began so early to make sore their mother's heart.

Mr. Thompson still maintained his post, and was practically, if not nominally, the master of the household. That he had some strange claim upon his mistress no one doubted, and there were those who did not hesitate to whisper that Lady Orwell and he had married privately—the Orwell folk being unaware of the existence of a Mrs. Jack Sparks, *alias* Mrs. Thompson; for the steward never spoke of himself as being a married man, and was popularly supposed to be a widower, as he owned to having had a son, who was "the living image" of the young lord.

As time passed on, Lady Orwell, still ignorant of Clarissa's fate, ceased to suffer from certain prickings of a conscience which was not quite dead in the first few months after her disappearance. She often wondered what had become of the girl, and she would not have been displeased to hear that she was in safe keeping *somewhere*, provided she was not too happy or too prosperous. Her ladyship would have been quite elate had she witnessed poor Clarissa's struggles for a living, or seen her in her last stage of hopelessness and shabbiness. That would have

been "just what she expected;" and we know how pleased people are, and especially people of a certain type, when things turn out according to their expectations. She had always prophesied that Clarissa would "come to no good," and we must confess she had done her utmost to bring about the accomplishment of her prediction; and to find her friendless and poverty-stricken would have been exactly what would have rejoiced her very heart, and convinced her that she herself really possessed a remarkable gift of prescience.

But one day she was rather rudely awakened from her state of comfortable security as regarded her injured step-daughter. She received a letter from Mr. Hadfield, informing her that Lady Clarissa Oakleigh had presented herself and claimed her legacy, and that he was preparing to prosecute her ladyship for having stolen his letters, and for having *forged* his client's signature to a certain document, which had been the source of much uneasiness to himself, and of serious disadvantage to his client, &c., &c. Of course, he only intended to give her the fright she so richly deserved, and it must be owned that he succeeded beyond his anticipations. The Countess was, as he had remarked to Clarissa, singularly ignorant, and Mr. Thompson, her sole confidant, was acquainted only with criminal law, and therefore in no condition to instruct his mistress, or give her sound advice.

It so chanced that the family were in town when this letter was written, and Mr. Thompson strongly advised her ladyship to go at once to Mr. Hadfield, and "make things straight," the best way that she could! "For you know, Loo," said he—he still called her Loo in strictly private interviews, and when any important discussion was on the carpet—"you know it would be uncommon awkward if the thing got wind and was talked about. You *did* forge Clarissa's name! there's no mincing the matter, and you did it to prevent her laying hold of her own property. Why! you might get seven years, Countess as you are."

"They would never dare. Besides, I could pay for counsel, and crush that insolent, meddlesome fellow, whose very name I hate."

“Don’t lay the flattering—what do you call it?—to your soul, Loo. English law is tolerably impartial, and all the world knows you are a nobody by birth. But convicted or not, it would be most unpleasant to be put upon your trial. It would be a fine piece of scandal in high life for all the old maids and dowagers to discuss over their tea and card tables. And then *everything*—absolutely everything—would come out, and it would get noised abroad how you tried to marry Lord Orwell’s daughter to that Chatters, who, between you and me, is as great a scamp as ever lived, and a disgrace to his cloth. And folks would know how you made a regular nursemaid of her, and a hundred disagreeable *facts* would come to light. And facts, let me tell you, are very troublesome things; there is no dealing with them, if in any way they can be proved—which facts mostly can. I’ve been in trouble myself, and so I ought to know. The long and the short of it is, that I advise you to lose no time in smoothing the affair over—if *you can*! And you mustn’t be too high and mighty, for you don’t hold good cards, and your game anyhow bids fair to be a losing one.”

“What excuse can I make?”

“Any excuse that seems best. I don’t teach ducks to swim, or hens to cackle. You always were able to give a good account of yourself; if ever a woman knew how to tell her own story, in her own way, ’twas you, Loo; and I should say you are not less clever than you were twenty years ago.”

“I shall pretend to be quite astonished; indeed, I am really astonished. I shall say that I had not the least idea I was acting unlawfully when, for the most excellent reasons, I kept back certain letters from a troublesome, ill-conditioned child, who was entirely dependent upon my bounty; and that, being bothered, I wrote in her name, simply to avoid further annoyance. No one could suppose I had any intention of actually defrauding; I didn’t want to handle poor Susan’s paltry savings; no one can say I did—a trifle of a hundred and sixty pounds, or thereabouts. The detestable girl has got her own at last, it seems, and why make any fuss? It must have been

accumulating all these years; so much the better for her. Orwell won't come into his property till he is twenty-one, why should she grumble at being in the same predicament? It would be a pretty sort of world if all the impatient minors and wards might get their money whenever the whim took them."

"That's neither here nor there; right's right, and wrong's wrong; and any number of blacks won't make a white. I am afraid you'll be told that you'd no business to interfere, and that to forge the name of a minor is as punishable by law as it is to forge the name of any grand personage come to middle age. Still, you must say something, and I don't see what else you can plead but that you didn't *mean* any harm. But sing small, Loo, sing small, my dear, and don't try to ride your high horse before the lawyer. You're uncommonly fond of that quadruped, I know, but it's downright foolishness to mount him when he's more than likely to spill you in the dust."

"I wish I had never meddled in the matter. You see, Jack, I *really* did it for the best. If Clarissa had known that she could go and get all that money straight away, there's no knowing what scrape she might have got into. I really thought I was doing my duty to my poor husband's daughter, and she was a girl that wanted the curb, if ever girl did."

"Tut! tut! that won't wash. It isn't supposed to be anybody's duty, under any circumstances, to forge letters—especially letters which have to do with money matters. And as for the girl herself, you know my opinion. A more sensible, better-conducted young woman than Lady Clarissa I never met with—and every inch a lady! What she might have been as a child I can't say. Many children are torments—all yours are—but from the time I first knew her she was as good and gentle and prettily-behaved as anyone could wish. And if ever a girl was tried in her temper and put upon, she was. And she only showed her spirit and proved her blood when she ran away. I'm glad to hear she's all safe; if she had come to grief, it would have been bad for you, if not in this world, in the next. Now, don't let the grass grow under your feet; make haste and stop proceedings—if you can."

"Had I not better put the case into the hands of my own solicitors? It would be more dignified."

"You can't afford to be dignified, Loo. It would be a nice thing to tell respectable lawyers that you had committed the crime of *forgery*, and wanted them to get you out of the dirt. Folks like Tarriton and Dunn don't do that sort of thing; they leave all that business to the Old Bailey lawyers. No, you must fight it out yourself; no one is more capable, once you make up your mind to it."

After a little hesitation Lady Orwell determined to beard the lion in his den next day, if only he would grant her an interview. The more she contemplated her position the less she liked it, and her conversation with her cousin had in no wise tended to reassure her. She was beginning to think that, after all, crooked ways were impolitic, and to fear lest her day of supremacy should be on the decline.

Mr. Hadfield received his visitor with grave, impassive politeness. He had her ushered into his own private sanctum, and instructed his confidential clerk to say that he was engaged on important business for the next hour, and was not to be disturbed. He handed her to a chair, and then seated himself, and waited for her to begin. For once she found it difficult to speak. At length she stammered out, "I wished to see you, Mr. Hadfield, about that *strange* letter I had from you the other day."

Mr. Hadfield bowed his head, but did not otherwise reply.

"I can't, for the life of me, understand it."

"What cannot your ladyship understand?"

"You say I have committed robbery and forgery. It is monstrous."

"If your ladyship did not suppress my letters and did not subscribe yourself 'Clarissa Oakleigh,' I humbly beg your pardon. It remains only to ascertain who did."

"How do you know that any letters were suppressed?"

"It is enough to reply that I do know; and I may add that you, Lady Orwell, know it as well as I do!"

"This is all a piece of your revenge; you want to pay me out because I found it convenient to take my affairs out of your hands."

"Your *ladyship* can give my conduct that interpretation if you please. It does not matter." His coolness and composure stung her to the quick.

"What have I done," she resumed, becoming lachrymose, "that you should treat me in this way? Your poor father would never have done it, I am persuaded."

"My father was extremely thankful when you notified your intention of removing your legal documents from our office. And his latest regret was that he had had a hand in bringing about a marriage which had proved so extremely unsatisfactory."

"You are not particularly gallant; I might go farther and say you are not at all polite, Mr. Hadfield."

"Gallantry, my lady, is out of the question, and considering that we are on the point of becoming plaintiff and defendant, too much politeness would be absurd."

"But we are not going to be plaintiff and defendant! That would be taking the quarrel into court," replied the lady, in great alarm. "You can't suppose I wanted the money—I, who have plenty of my own? And such a pitiful few pounds, too!"

"Which makes your conduct in the affair doubly culpable. You acted the part of dog in the manger."

"How can you tell it was I?"

"If it were not, it is for your ladyship to deny the allegation, and to prove your innocence in open court."

"Of course I have to thank Clarissa for this unpleasantness. Of course you and she have combined together to vex and humble me."

"On the contrary, Lady Clarissa is in perfect ignorance of the whole matter. She saw the forged letter, and at once declared it to be in your handwriting; but I do not think it ever occurred to her to punish you for your wrong-doing."

"And if she don't interfere, you can't," suddenly interposed the Countess, with a sharpness that proved her to be no simpleton, ignorant though she might be; "whoever wrote that letter forged *her* name, not yours, and if she don't prosecute, you can't—there now!"

"But you stole—or shall I say appropriated?—the letters I wrote to Lady Clarissa. The one case involves

the other—the forgery *must* come to light, even if no one prosecute. It may not be deemed expedient, it may not be possible, to send you to Botany Bay; but there is another place, to which persons in society, especially ladies, are inevitably consigned, if they bring any disgrace upon themselves and their order. And I think that if your guilt were proved, or only mooted, Lady Orwell, you would soon find yourself in the unhappy locality I have referred to.”

“What locality, pray?”

“*Coventry!* Not the city of Godiva, but the city of ostracised individuals.”

As Lady Orwell had never even heard of the *ostracism*, this allusion was lost upon her. She was silent, for she understood the full force of being “sent to Coventry,” and to Coventry she knew she must go, if this stupid story should get into the newspapers. And if her name once came before the public, who could say what inquiries would be made, and what inconvenient disclosures would follow? Her Whitechapel birth and breeding might become patent to all the world; there were a good many people who, once in possession of the missing link which united the fates of Louisa Sparks and of the Countess of Orwell, would be only too ready to come forward and supply full information. Then Chatters was her declared enemy, and would be delighted to see her humbled, and so, of course, would Clarissa. And, somehow, she did not feel so very sure about Mr. Thompson, and she was terribly in his power, though no one knew it but herself. All things considered, she concluded that it was of no avail to make fight against the accusation; her only way was ingenuously to confess her fault, and protest that she had not the least idea that she was doing wrong, or that her offence was actionable. So she commenced: “Well, Mr. Hadfield, it’s of no use beating about the bush with a lawyer, and especially with one so clever as yourself, so I’ll own here and now that I *did* suppress your letters—three of them—to my ward and step-daughter, Clarissa Oakleigh. And then, feeling that I could not go on with it, and that it would do the girl a great injury to let her receive the money in her then state of wayward revolt

and rash insubordination, I thought to settle the matter quietly by writing in her name, and desiring you to keep both principal and interest in your own hands till she was of age. And what could have been better for her? I did not try to steal the money; I wouldn't have defrauded her of one penny of it for the world. What harm have I done? I made a mistake—a very foolish mistake; I see it now. But I was left a poor, desolate widow, with this girl, who always set me at defiance, on my hands—and I did it for the best."

"Your good sense might have told you that cheating and trickery could not be for the best. It never answers to do evil that good may follow. Besides, in this case, good did not and could not follow; you satisfied your grudge against Lady Clarissa, and strengthened, as you supposed, your hold upon her; but by putting a stop to the intercourse between her and her true friends you did my client a great and grievous injury, and you exposed me to serious misconstruction. Your ladyship must perceive that such a course of conduct cannot be justified, and that to permit it to go unquestioned and uncensured, is to shirk one's duty as a member of civilised society. If everybody, who could do it, thought fit to forge letters for ulterior purposes, what would become of the community at large? Faith and honour would be lost, and there would be no trust in the world."

"I admit it, Mr. Hadfield—I admit it; you show me how blameable I have been. I acknowledge my offence, and I am ready to make reparation. Pray let it go no farther."

"What reparation can you make?"

"Let me double the sum you hold, or did hold, for Lady Clarissa."

"I do not hesitate, in Lady Clarissa's name, to decline your proposal. She cherishes, I am persuaded, no enmity against you, but nothing, I feel assured, would induce her to accept anything at your hands."

"What can I do, then?"

"I will tell you. A formal confession of this little transaction shall be drawn up, and it shall be read aloud to your ladyship. You will then sign it in full, in the presence of two witnesses."

"I won't do it."

"Very well. In that case you may expect me to take steps."

"You are very hard and cruel, Mr. Hadfield. Why! a lot of people will know about it, and it will get bruited here and there, till it will be all one as if it had come into open court."

"No one will know, if you keep your own counsel. I will draw up the document myself, and no one else shall set eyes upon it. The witnesses will not know what you sign. I shall call it in their hearing a deed of release, which is a common thing enough."

"And you won't produce it against me? I am not so stupid that I don't know it will be evidence against me of the most conclusive character."

"Your ladyship's penetration does you credit. It is a pity you should not always see things clearly. No; I will not produce the paper against you, I promise you that."

"Under no circumstances?"

"Under no circumstances, Lady Orwell. A Hadfield's word is his bond."

"Then I think I'll consent, if you are sure you'll not bother me any more. Where is Clarissa?"

"I have not her ladyship's instructions to declare her place of residence at present. I am, however, glad to inform you that she is quite well and very happy, and under the honourable protection of friends of her own standing. A person of Lady Clarissa's merits—so very charming a person—is sure to make fast friends."

"But she has nothing to live on, except the trifle Susan Shrosbery left her. It was like Clarissa's bad luck, Susan's dying little more than a fortnight before she came of age. If Miss Shrosbery had lived a little longer, Clarissa would have been provided for."

"Lady Clarissa's 'luck,' I trust, has turned. And she is in no difficulty as respects an income."

"Bless us! how has she got it? Have her pictures come to be the fashion?"

"I am not at liberty to discuss my client's affairs. I simply observe that Lady Clarissa is in every way independent of yourself."

"She's like a cat, and falls upon her feet! Most young women would find their characters damaged, eloping as *she* did, a girl of seventeen, and hiding herself away from her relations for four years."

"She took due precautions. She has been under respectable, matronly guidance from the first, so that the breath of scandal cannot touch her."

There was no more to be said, though the Countess was ready to eat her finger-ends with secret rage. She signed the paper two days afterwards, and Mr. Thompson assured her she was well quit of a troublesome concern, and he would advise her never to forge anybody's signature again.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

"Oh, dream of joy! Is this indeed
The lighthouse top I see?
Is this the hill? Is this the kirk?
Is this mine own countree?"

On the evening of a beautiful summer day, the new first-class, fast-sailing steamer, the *Pearl of Columbia*, was coming up the Mersey into Liverpool. Fine steamers were not so plentiful then as now, and the "quick passage" was something altogether unprecedented. The *Pearl* had had a wonderfully prosperous voyage; from the day she left New York till she anchored in her dock at Liverpool, she had nothing but favourable winds and soft pleasant breezes that wafted her smoothly into port.

She had steamed on, without let or hindrance, making punctually and easily so many knots an hour, to the great satisfaction of the gallant captain, who was as proud of the *Pearl*, and loved her, from her "sky-scrappers" to her keel, as if she had been his bride or his daughter, the only

child of his affections. The passengers had enjoyed the voyage thoroughly, even the most sensitive had been but slightly and briefly visited by that cruel demon of the waters, *mal de mer*; there had been dancing and singing on the quarter-deck, and pleasant talks during fresh, bright mornings, and lazy lounges in warm golden afternoons, and quiet conversations in the glorious sunsets, when the sea was all crimson and purple, in the lovely, radiant light that burned so solemnly on the western horizon, which they left behind them.

There were moonlit nights, too, when the waves heaved and shone like molten silver; nights too bright for sleep, too warm for the confined space below; nights that disposed people to make confidences, and to listen sympathetically to each other's past experiences. It was curious to note with what different emotions the passengers, who had grown so intimate beneath the flowing standard of the *Pearl*, were approaching the shores of the old world. Some were Americans visiting "Europe" for the first, or perhaps for the fourteenth time, as the case might be; some were returning to their native land after a brief absence—men to whom "crossing" was little more than going from one town to another; and some were bound for English shores, after many long years of exile and separation.

All were assembled now on deck, waiting for the pilot-tug that was to take them up the river. There was a grave, set look on every face, for who knew what might have happened since the last letters were received from home? There were few whose fears, however transient, did not mingle with the pleasures of anticipation. But of all the company there was only one who knew neither hope nor dread, as the low-lying Lancashire shore, with its treeless wastes of mud and sandhills, burned in the rosy sunset light. And this one was an elderly, the young folks called him an old, man, who had been much sought out during the brief voyage of twelve days. Everybody liked him, and had a good word to say for him, and everybody wondered who he was, and nearly everybody came to the conclusion that he was *somebody*.

Was he English or American? No one could be quite

satisfied on that point; he had never proclaimed his nationality, and with all his kindness, and even sweetness of deportment, there was a certain dignity in his tone and manners that checked impertinent and even natural curiosity. He was tall, but rather bent; his face, still handsome, was thoughtful, and bore the traces of many a past sorrow; his hair was grey, especially his beard, which was unwontedly luxuriant for those days, when all good, respectable Britishers made it their duty to inflict matutinal torture on their chins and upper lips with unflinching fortitude and strict regularity. His complexion was dark, chiefly from exposure to sun and air, it would appear, for once or twice, when he bared his throat, it was noticed that it was singularly fair. But his eyes were wonderful! Everybody said so—passengers and crew—from the captain himself down to the mischievous cabin-boy, whose pranks made him at once the torment and delight of all on board; and “that what everybody says must be true” is a well-known and well-accepted axiom, into the philosophy of which it is needless to inquire. Those same dark eyes, when you came to look into them, were not black—they were rather of a deep, soft, slate colour; but the colour of them was forgotten in the expression, which was at once sad and hopeful, gentle and determined, kind and severe; eyes that told of no ordinary mind and no common spirit hidden behind their marvellous grave lustre. The owner of these beautiful eyes had made himself very popular during the voyage; the crew to a man praised him, his fellow-passengers admired him, and, still more, they believed in him, told him their own stories, and asked his advice, though they knew nothing of his antecedents, or of his present position in society. They *thought* he was rich—some were sure of it; still, it could be no more than a supposition; but all were agreed that he was truly, and in every sense of the word, a *gentleman*. “Yes, and a Christian gentleman,” was the captain’s comment, when Mr. Grey was once the subject of private conversation.

“Are you expecting your friends at Liverpool?” asked a lady, who, leaning on her husband’s arm, was intently watching the approach of the pilot-boat.

Mr. Grey started, for just then he was absorbed in his own reflections, but he turned courteously to the speaker, whom he really liked, and replied, "No, Mrs. Calcott, for the very excellent reason that I have not, to the best of my knowledge, any friends in England."

"Ah! there must be some, one or two at least; you are not the man to be without friends wherever you may go."

"I must make them, then, in England. For of the few I left not one survives. How long do you suppose I have been away?"

"Twenty years, perhaps," replied Mr. Calcott; "perhaps rather longer. My own brother, who is still over there"—pointing westwards—"has not been home these five-and-twenty years; but he talks of joining us when two or three more summers have passed over him, if God spare his life. I will guess, then, that you, Mr. Grey, left England a quarter of a century ago."

"It is more than forty years since I saw that 'Black Rock' yonder fade into the speck that it is now. It was the last I saw of old England."

"You must have been quite a boy."

"I was a very young man, and I was poor. The girl I loved—or thought I loved—jilted me for a richer suitor. I had but one near relative, a sister, who was in the care of an aunt with whom I was no favourite, and whom I was not permitted to visit. She—my sister—was, as I believed, provided for. She was an only daughter, and gave promise of great personal loveliness. She was to be her aunt's heiress, and I was given to understand that she was intended for some high destiny. I loved my little sister, but I was not allowed to enjoy much of her society; my aunt did not approve of me, and she accredited me with all sorts of objectionable habits, and with some few vices, which, thank God, I knew only by repute. So I thought I would leave England, where I had few ties and small prospect of success in life, and try whether fortune would favour me in some other part of the great globe. Since then I have sojourned in every quarter of the world, and there are few countries which I do not know something about."

"You have been in India, of course?"

"I was in India for many years; but my first foreign experiences were in the United States of America. Afterwards I was in Brazil and in Mexico; then I crossed to the Eastern continent, did business in Madras and Calcutta, with China and Japan; then retraced my steps to Mexico—where I had some strange adventures—and finally settled down in the State of New York, where I quite intended to end my days; till, all on a sudden, there arose within me a strong and inexplicable desire to visit my own country before I died, and to look once again on the almost forgotten scenes of my youth. For some time I fought with the inclination, for I told myself that I was no longer an Englishman, but a cosmopolitan, and that I should find, at the best, but one or two graves to link me with the past. Still, even after I had, as I thought, decided to remain in my favourite home, among those who had grown to be to me as my own people, I was restless, and ever thinking of the land which gave me birth. At last an accident—or what seemed to be so—made me resolve to indulge my wishes. I am so accustomed to travel both by sea and by land that a few thousand miles of the former went for a very little, and though I am a good deal worn from exposure and hardship in the commencement of my career, when I was still struggling with adverse circumstances, I am stronger and altogether more robust than many men twenty years my junior. The long and short of it is—I am here! and yonder lies Liverpool. It is curious that I should come back to the exact spot whence I started."

"You will find Liverpool wonderfully changed. It was of little account, I believe, forty years ago; now it has taken the shine out of Bristol, and competes with the metropolis itself in point of shipping interest."

"I went away, too, in a miserable little sailing vessel, that might have had half-a-dozen Jonahs on board, it encountered such dreadful weather. I return in a magnificent steamer, that ploughs the waves as if it were their queen and mistress; and not the ghost of a squall has it met since it slipped its moorings."

"It must be a strange sensation, going home as it were to an unknown country—yourself passed out of know-

ledge. Forgive me, though, if thoughtlessly I touch a wound."

"There is nothing to forgive; there was but one person in England about whom I was ever really concerned, and she has been dead—let me see! how many years?—why, it must be full two-and-twenty years since I read in the papers the notice of her death."

"Your sister, you mean?" said Mrs. Calcott, with all a woman's kindly curiosity, which is, after all, but another name for sympathetic interest.

"My sister! There were but two of us, and we were orphans. I wrote to her as soon as I had obtained settled employment, and told her if ever she wanted friends and means of living, she was to come out to me, and I would do my best for her, and share with her what I had, whether it were a palace or a hut, a dry crust or a banquet. My letter was never answered. After a few months I wrote again, and with the same result. I concluded that Clarissa had never received either communication. Then I wrote to the aunt who had adopted her, entreating that I might have news of my only sister, whom I very dearly loved, and whose protector I would be if ever she needed one. Three months after I read in a year-old newspaper that I found tossing about in a Mexican *café*, of this aunt's sudden death."

"And did she fulfil her promise of making Miss Grey her heiress?"

"I cannot say certainly, but I am inclined to believe she did, for when, afterwards, being painfully anxious about my sister, who *might* be cast upon the world for all I knew, I wrote to my agent in London to make inquiries, he gave me full information respecting her, and sent me a copy of the certificate of her marriage with the Earl of Orwell! She would scarcely have made so grand a match had she been left in poor or middling circumstances."

"Probably not. Though occasionally well-born young ladies, reduced in position, do marry well, especially if they happen to be beautiful."

"That occurs more frequently in novels than in real life, I should imagine. My own impression is, that

Clarissa was properly introduced into society—‘brought out,’ as your English aristocracy say—and married, as a matter of course, at the close of her first season.”

“You would have no difficulty in communicating with her, then.”

“I suppose not; but then I cared no more to communicate with her. I wanted my little loving sister, Clarissa Grey, not the fashionable Countess of Orwell. The child I had loved and pined after seemed to disappear, and in her stead remained only a proud and stately lady, who would scarcely thank such a roving adventurer as I was in those days for claiming kindred. I knew that Clarissa was rich and titled, and I trusted she was happy—the Earl was said to have made a ‘love-match.’ At any rate, she had passed out of my sphere; I thought it was best to go my own way, and leave my lady to go hers.”

“That was pride,” said Mrs. Calcott, gently. “Forgive me, Mr. Grey, but it was not worthy of you. You could not tell but that your sister, amid all her grandeur, pined for you, even as you pined for her. A woman may be a countess, and yet not happy. I think you ought to have written to her.”

“I think so now. I thought so when, little more than six years afterwards, I read the announcement of her death. I cut out the paragraph from the *Times*. I have it still. It said, ‘Died, on the 20th May, at Orwell Castle, East-shire, Clarissa, Countess of Orwell. Her ladyship, only daughter and surviving child of the late Rev. — Grey, of Crestworth, married Francis, ninth Earl of Orwell, in 18—, and died of consumption in the twenty-eighth year of her age, leaving no issue.’ I was sorry that she died childless; I was getting a rich man by that time, and I should have liked to be a good, generous uncle to one of her little ones; but it was ordered otherwise, and doubtless for the best, for after all my wanderings and buffetings, I was scarcely the uncle for little lords and ladies. Clarissa’s death severed the last tie that bound me to the old country, and I gave myself, as far as I could, to the country of my adoption; for when I grew wearied of travel, and tired of heaping up money that must go, for want of heirs, to public charities, I made my home, as I

thought, for the remainder of my life, in the State of New York. And what really possessed me to cross the Atlantic again, and revisit the land which I left three-and-forty years ago, is more than I can tell. I seek nothing in England; I have no object but to kneel once at Clarissa's grave. I shall be interested, no doubt, in the changes I shall observe, and there are some places of note I must see before I take my passage back again. Ah! we are really on the river! Dear me! what forests of masts! and those houses there—quite a little town!”

“That is New Brighton.”

“Never heard of it. It looks forlorn enough though; as ugly as Old Brighton, without its prestige, and the shelter of its South Downs.”

In a few minutes all was bustle, and in the pale twilight of the midsummer night, the Calcotts and Mr. Grey took leave of one another, with a promise of meeting, however, in London, in several weeks' time. The Calcotts slept one night in Liverpool, and then went on to their London home—they had only been paying a visit to the New World. Mr. Grey, having nothing in particular to do, and wishing to turn his leisure to the best account, loitered in the neighbourhood of Liverpool for several days, then visited Chester, and made a short tour in North Wales. After that, he turned his face eastwards, determined to go on pilgrimage to Orwell before he made any further plans, or saw the Calcotts again.

Desiring to see as much of the country as possible, he posted it all the way to Ipsleigh, and there halting for a single night, he thought it might be as well to learn what he could about the noble family at Orwell. That the Earl was dead he knew, and that he had left a widow and family of young children. He had therefore married again, within a year or two—as it would appear—of losing his wife Clarissa. Mr. Grey thought, too, that he might as well pay the Countess-Dowager a visit, and explain his relationship to her predecessor. He was not shy of titled ladies now, for he was so rich that he scarcely knew what he was worth, and he had learned to hold his own, long since, in any circle of society.

So he invited the landlord of the inn where he put up,

to sup with him, with a view to learning all that he wished to know of Orwell and its inhabitants. Mine host was a well-mannered elderly man, very deferential to a guest who evidently cared nothing for expense, and by no means disinclined to take up the parable on the subject of the Orwell family.

"Well! that is strange!" he said, when he had listened to Mr. Grey's introductory statement; "we never so much as knew that the Countess Clarissa ever had a brother. But she has been dead and buried these twenty years—and more. How time flies! She was the loveliest creature that ever walked the earth, was our old Countess—as we used to call her to distinguish her from the present lady, the young Earl's mother—and a great favourite with all about here, high and low. Poor lady, she had bad health after her little daughter was born; and it was a great disappointment to my lord that she bore him no son and heir. Folks did say he neglected her. I am sure I cannot tell whether it was truth or not. Anyhow, he took to wild ways, and got into money troubles, and he was abroad—at some gaming-place, I am afraid—when his beautiful young wife died."

"Poor Clarissa!" sighed Mr. Grey. "What a wretch I was not to assure myself of her happiness! A neglected wife! And I might have done much to cheer and comfort her!" Then aloud: "She is buried at Orwell, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, and in the church. My lord lies there now; in death they were re-united," said the landlord, feeling almost sentimental.

"And the little daughter you spoke of, how long did she survive her birth, and does she lie with her parents?"

"The daughter, sir. Bless you! my Lady Clarissa is alive now. I know them as saw her not many weeks ago."

"But the newspapers—the *Times* even—said that the Countess died 'without issue;' I remember the exact words."

"The *Times* for once made a mistake, sir. And considering that the Countess and her child lived always in retirement, and that the Earl was always bewailing his

heirless condition—making his little girl count for nothing, as you may say—I don't think it is much to be wondered at. But the peerage will tell you different; I've got one handy, and you may know for yourself, sir. Here it is! the book opens naturally at the Orwell page; and it's a new one, too! my old peerage book was quite out of date—as well it might be, seeing that my father bought it when I was a little lad. Look: 'By the first marriage, "no issue;" by the second—Clarissa Grey: one daughter, Lady Clarissa, born 18—, married 18—to the Rev. Horace Willoughby, second son of Sir Edward Willoughby, Bart., of Grosvenor Square, London, and Cottisham Park, Yorkshire. Has issue, one son and a daughter.' "

Yes, there it stood! Mr. Grey was speechless. Oh! why had he not come sooner? To think that Clarissa left a child, after all, and that the child had grown up and married without his being aware of her existence. "She is not now at Orwell, I suppose?" was his next question.

"Dear me, sir—*no!* The Countess and my Lady Clarissa are not on terms; and, to tell the truth, my lady ran away from home, ten or eleven years ago, when she was a girl of seventeen, or thereabouts."

Mr. Grey groaned aloud. "To think that my sister Clarissa's daughter should do such a thing. *Ran away from home!*"

"Begging your pardon, sir, she is none the worse for that. The Countess from the first hated my Lady Clarissa like poison, and when the Earl died, leaving no provision for his eldest daughter, the poor young lady got very shameful treatment. Her stepmother kept her in the nursery, to wait upon her own unruly children; she made a regular drudge of her, and at last would have married her to a fellow to whom no honest man would give his daughter. I'd have cracked his head if he had dared to look at *my* girls—who are good girls, though only an innkeeper's!"

"Tell me the whole story—as far as you know it," said Mr. Grey.

And the landlord did tell it, to the best of his ability

truthfully enough in the main; if the Countess and Chatters were painted a little blacker than they deserved, where is the wonder? Mr. Grey listened in amazement and sorrow, now blaming himself, and now pouring out his wrath on the present Lady Orwell. He heard, too—what he was on no account to repeat—what was *whispered* about among the Ipsleigh folk, with something like relish, as it seemed to Mr. Grey—that the Countess had speculated wildly and lost immense sums of money; that her steward, Mr. Thompson, had some strange influence over her; that there was an intimacy between mistress and servant which ill-accorded with their relative positions; that the unfortunate lady was much harassed and distressed for want of cash; and finally, that the young Earl, who was not yet of age, had plunged over head and ears in debt, was given to sundry vices and low pursuits, had lately been *rusticated*—whatever that might mean, but mine host conjectured that it was the University term for *expulsion*; and, worst of all, had contracted a private though legal marriage with an actress some years his senior, and of damaged reputation.

“I am sorry for the Countess-Dowager,” said Mr. Grey; “has she any comfort, or hope of comfort, in her younger children?”

“The brothers, as to their conduct, are as alike as so many peas,” returned the landlord. “They are the curse of the neighbourhood. But it serves her ladyship right; she has sown all she reaps; she is hardly to be pitied; in fact, if anybody is to be pitied, it is the lads themselves, that lost their father—who would no doubt have done his duty by them—and were left to such a mother. And all the country cries shame on her for her treatment of Lady Clarissa; but she don’t care—she’s just that sort that cares for nothing.”

“I shall make a point of seeing her to-morrow, and I shall ask her what has become of my niece Clarissa. I shall have something to say to the Dowager-Countess of Orwell, and it will not be by any means of a complimentary nature; she shall hear a few wholesome truths, *for once!*”

CHAPTER XLIX.

A MISERABLE WOMAN.

"My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of life are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone."

MR. GREY meditated long and seriously after his host wished him "good-night;" and before he went to sleep he arranged his plan of action. Next morning he ordered a post-chaise betimes, and had himself driven to the village of Orwell-Magna, alighting at the ancient hostelry of "The Orwell Arms." There he ordered a second breakfast, or at least a meal so-called, which displayed all the constituents of a substantial luncheon. And while he breakfasted, he inquired for the landlord.

The portly dame to whom he addressed himself replied, "There isn't any landlord, now, sir; my good man departed this life five years ago. I keep on the business myself; and I've a barman who's worth his weight in gold."

"I beg your pardon," returned Mr. Grey. "I only wanted to ask a few questions about the family at the Castle, and I dare say you can answer them."

"It would be odd if I couldn't, sir. I was second housemaid there in the time of the Countess Clarissa, as we call her, to distinguish her from the first Countess, and from her ladyship the present Dowager."

"Oh! the Earl is married, then? He is full young to take a wife."

"He's a boy, sir, and nothing more; and a very bad boy, too. If I thought my little Isaac—he's ten come Martinmas—would grow up half as wicked, I'd pray God to call him now, while he's an innocent child."

"Does his mother take it to heart?"

"That she does! But what could she expect? She

brought him up never to be crossed, and she let him bully and domineer when he was only in petticoats. Oh, dear! what a life he did lead his nurses!—and especially his half-sister, my Lady Clarissa.”

“She was the Countess Clarissa’s daughter, of course?”

“She was, and a sweeter young lady never wore shoe leather, though as a child she was wayward and troublesome enough. She had a fine spirit of her own, but she—that is, the Dowager now—soon broke it. It was an ill day for Lady Clarissa when my late lord brought home his new wife to Orwell.”

“Is there not a story about Lady Clarissa *eloping*?”

“There is a story about Lady Clarissa, sir, but as to eloping, that’s all rubbish! She went away unknown to her stepmother; she could do nothing else, poor young lady! There was a fellow at the Castle in those days—just about eleven years ago, it is—named Chatters, and the Countess made up her mind to marry him to Lady Clarissa.”

“And Lady Clarissa could not fancy him?”

“She couldn’t abide him! He was no fit match for any respectable young woman, let alone her father’s daughter. She might as well have matched with such a man as my husband, and better, for he was a decent, upright character, and born of honest, respectable, though lowly parents, which this Chatters wasn’t. Well, the two of them—Chatters and the Countess—made the place all too hot for Lady Clarissa. It was pretended that she had encouraged him; they even spread it about that she had demeaned herself by meeting him privately in the grounds, or in out-of-the-way corners of the Castle, after dark. The Countess went so far as to say that, for Lady Clarissa’s own sake, it *must* be a marriage, and that pretty quickly. Her own dread, I believe, was, that partly by worry and partly by intimidation, urging that her character was lost irretrievably unless she became Chatters’ wife, they would some day, in one of her weak moments, draw her into the snare. She was so helpless, you see, sir, like a poor bird caught and fluttering in a net, and they that were compassing her ruin were strong and cunning, and downright unprincipled; they’d stick at

nothing to carry out their purpose, and she knew it but too well."

"Did no one guess that she was going? Had she no confidant?"

"Yes, one; but that one kept her counsel for many a day. Old Mrs Sweetapple, that had served the house of Orwell from girlhood to old age—she was housekeeper for I couldn't say how many years, and Lady Clarissa put trust in her, and Mrs. Sweetapple helped her, and arranged for her journey. We didn't know it till very lately, when the old lady's daughter, leaving these parts, spoke up, and told the whole story from beginning to end. We always suspected it, but we didn't know for certain. And we heard how Lady Clarissa went to London and lived with Fancy Saunders, who had once been her maid, but was then married respectably, and living somewhere in town."

"But what did Lady Clarissa do in London? She would not be dependent on former servants, however faithful; and you say she had nothing of her own?"

"Not a sixpence! The Earl died suddenly, through an accident in the hunting-field, as I dare say you have heard——" And here the landlady went into those particulars which you have already had, speaking also of Miss Shrosbery, who would have provided for Lady Clarissa if she had lived but a few days longer, and dwelling largely upon Clarissa's experiences in the Orwell nursery, at once the slave and butt of the unruly children, and the despised companion of the other nurses. "Which I did ought to know all about," she assured her guest, "for I had a niece in the house at that time, and she was a good deal in the nursery sewing, and she saw and heard things that wouldn't be believed by anybody who was unacquainted with the true state of things."

"And who is at the Castle now?"

"Only the dowager and the young ladies; my lord and my lady—such a 'my lady!'—are away in London. I think Mr. Sydney and Lady Louisa Maria are with their mother; I am not sure. We don't have much to do with the Castle nowadays, and the less the better. And the Earl, it is said, has quarrelled with his mother, because

she's wasted all his estate, and he's worse off than his father was when, for the sake of her money, he married her—ay, and repented it ever after!”

“She was a rich widow, I have been told.”

“She was that, sir. She married first a foolish old man, who left her all he had, without conditions. And we do always say she as good as bought her coronet with her gold. Ah! such marriages never come to good! But now—if all that's talked be true—there's little more than the coronet left again. It's a mystery where such a power of money's gone to! Some folks do say that Mr. Thompson has handled the Orwell property just as if it was his own. He is a queer one.”

“Who is Mr. Thompson?”

“The Countess introduced him, just before her husband's death, as house-steward; but, after my lord died, he seemed by degrees to become master of everything, and he was soon, to all intents and purposes, land-steward as well. And he's that familiar with the Countess—that is, the Dowager!—— Well! I never did talk scandal, and I won't begin now; but he's been *heard* to call her ‘*Loo!*’”

“Well, I am going to see this wonderful and unpopular Countess-Dowager.”

“Oh, dear, sir, and I thought you was quite a stranger; and I've spoken that free——! But there, I haven't said a word that is not naked truth. And I don't care twopence for her ladyship, nor for the Earl either, only they *could* turn us out of this house, that's been in the family near upon two hundred years, when our lease is up. But, thank goodness, it has thirteen years to run: so it don't much matter.”

“Do not be afraid; I shall respect your confidence. You have only answered my questions, and told me what I wished to know. I thank you very much. When I tell you that the late Countess Clarissa was my only sister, you will understand that I am in no wise disposed to side with the woman who presumed to make a nursemaid of my niece, and persecute her almost to the death. I have heard a good deal before, but I wished to ascertain the sentiments of those who must know a good deal about the

truth, and who have been upon the spot for the last twenty years."

"Indeed, sir, I beg pardon for speaking so freely. Well, I am right glad for Lady Clarissa's sake, though I believe she is very happy now, and has the best of husbands, and two most lovely children. Still, it will surely be a great pleasure to her to see her own dear mother's brother. And do you know, sir, your eyes are just like Lady Clarissa's, and hers were like the Countess's."

And then Mr. Grey prepared to walk up to the Castle; he could see the North Lodge gates from the window where he sat. "I shall dine and sleep here," he said, as he departed; "let me have a good dinner at six o'clock, and see that my bed is well aired." In a few minutes he was sauntering up the long double avenue, under the very trees which had overshadowed his sister and her noble husband, when, nearly thirty years before, they had, as bride and bridegroom, approached the Castle. But some of the grandest trees were gone, and, wandering a little into the park, Mr. Grey perceived that the timber had been felled to an extent that proved the fact of family financial difficulty. As he came near to the house he discerned many signs of neglect, and, altogether, the estate had the air of a place sinking slowly but surely to decay.

He entered the great hall—for the door stood wide open—and waited till someone should appear. Seeing a servant on the stairs he beckoned to him, and desired him to carry a card—on which he had written something—to the Countess-Dowager. After a few minutes' delay the servant returned, and requested the visitor to follow him.

The Dowager sat at her *escritoire* in the very room where she had received Mr. Hadfield years before, in the first days of her widowhood. The name on the card had not enlightened her; she had quite forgotten that Clarissa's mother was a Miss Grey, and she had racked her brains trying to recall the associations of the name with something—she could not remember what.

"I dare say, now, he is come about that hateful mortgage," she said to herself; "I knew they would foreclose! And I'm sure I don't know what to do. It's no use con-

sulting Orwell! I must call Jack to deal with him if necessary—but I am terribly afraid Jack is, and always has been, feathering his own nest at the expense of mine.” And then she told the servant to show up the stranger, and if she rang the bell twice, to request Mr. Thompson to attend her immediately.

Mr. Grey had heard of her as a fine woman, who had been very handsome in her day; but he found it impossible to credit the statement. He thought she could never have been even moderately good-looking. If being tall and large constituted a “fine” woman, then the lady might lay claim to certain charms; but height without grace, and breadth without fair proportions, were not what Mr. Grey admired. The once brilliant complexion had become coarse and red and sallow, and, except upon occasions, she seldom now put on either rouge or pearl-powder. The once dark hair, always of harsh texture, was now of that dead dull iron-grey that is more unbecoming than any other colour; there were lines and wrinkles on the face, that told their tale of secret worries and perplexities and evil tempers long-indulged. And, to crown all, her ladyship’s dress was most slovenly in the extreme; she never made a grand toilet as in old times, unless some visitor of importance was expected, and it was not worth while to retire and beautify—the process was becoming more and more lengthy and complicated—for a mere Mr. Grey, a tiresome man of business!

So she received that gentleman in an old green silk gown, in the last stage of shabby gentility, her ruffles all torn and rumpled, and her rough, leaden-hued hair unbecomingly pushed back from a bold face that showed large cheek-bones, thin straight lips, and a most unlovely colouring of greyish brown, with here and there a dash of dull coarse red. She was really only fifty-six years of age—she looked at least ten years older. For nothing ages people—more especially women—than a selfish, self-seeking, unprincipled life, such as she had led ever since her second marriage. She bowed in her old, would-be dignified fashion, as Mr. Grey entered, and he said, “I believe I speak to the Countess-Dowager of Orwell?”

He was about to say, "I believe *I have the honour, &c.*," but, being a scrupulously truthful man, he checked himself in time. The lady again bowed, and she looked at him with renewed suspicion. The man was gravely courteous, but there was nothing of deference, no acknowledgment of her superiority, in his tone or manner. She began to fear that things were worse than she had supposed, and that his arrival boded the reverse of good. But, with all her faults, she was not a coward, as her sons were, and she speedily plucked up courage to address him. "Be seated, sir; you come, I conclude, on behalf of Messrs. *Cheatem and Doom?*"

"I do not know any such persons."

"On whose business, then, sir, are you here?"

"On my own, or, rather, on that of my niece, Lady Clarissa Oakleigh."

"Your niece!" with scornful incredulity. "Clarissa Oakleigh never had an uncle, and if you were what you claim to be you would know that that young person is *not* now Clarissa Oakleigh! She chose to marry, four years since, without even asking the consent of her brother, or of any of her relations."

"I do know that Clarissa is married, and, as I am led to understand, she was forced—I say *forced*—to sever herself from all connection with her family long before the happy event occurred."

"Clarissa was a very bad, wilful, rebellious girl, and she wore me almost into my grave with her shameful pranks. Why, she once set her big dog on me, and all but killed me! Nobody knows what I had to endure through that wicked, cruel girl. She came between my lord and me, too; and yet, when he died, and left her without the smallest provision, I befriended and sheltered her, and would have given her a suitable dowry had she married the worthy young man, who would have made her the best of husbands."

"Your ladyship could not surely have believed that of Mr. Chatters. A person less esteemed could scarcely be; nor was the young man at all in her own rank of life; it was gross presumption on his part to dream of mating with the Earl's daughter. I am thankful that my niece

proved to be worthy of her ancestors, and exposed herself to danger and difficulty rather than brook so disgraceful an alliance—*mésalliance* in every sense of the word, and that your ladyship knows as well, or better, than I do; and it was out of pure malice and hatred of your step-daughter that you arranged the match.”

“And pray who are you, sir, that you presume to come and call me to account under my son’s roof? If he were at home——”

“He might probably take my view of the subject, as you and he are not exactly friends at present. I have told you who I am; my name is Edward Grey, and Clarissa, Countess of Orwell, *née* Grey, was my only sister; we two were the only surviving children of our parents, who died when we were both young, when Clarissa was a mere child.”

“I don’t believe it,” returned her ladyship, with some brusqueness; “I never heard my late lord speak of any brother of his former wife; he must have known if such a person existed. And I am sure the girl herself never dreamed of having an uncle; she had, literally, not a single relation on her mother’s side. Sir, you are an impostor!”

“If it pleases you to say so, madam, I will not be discourteous enough to give you the lie. It does not much matter what you pronounce me to be; after to-day we shall probably not meet again. Clarissa and her husband, I hope, will not disown me, more especially as I am prepared at once to declare her my sole heiress. It has pleased God to give me great riches; and who so fit to have them while I live, and inherit them when I am gone, as my dear sister’s child?”

“I am sure I delight to hear it,” replied the lady, in tones that were meant to be silky, but sounded snaky in spite of herself. She felt sick and faint with passionate envy and regret; but it was her policy always to make friends with the rich and powerful, and now that evil days were at hand, it behoved her to secure allies wherever she could find them. She wished now she had been on better terms with Clarissa—for Clarissa, a great heiress, would be a very different person from Clarissa, &

destitute orphan, such as she had been. "One never knows what may happen," she cogitated. "If I had only guessed that this uncle lived!—yes! he *is* her uncle; he has her eyes!—and was perhaps a *millionaire*! richer than I ever was, may be, and only waiting to endow her with his wealth, I would have made quite a pet of her, that I would! It was a mistake putting her in the nursery, and a mistake encouraging that scamp—that ungrateful wretch, Chatters. I see it now; and I'm afraid it's too late. I went too far; she will never come round, never believe that I entertained any sincere regard for her!"

She could only continue to affirm that she rejoiced, "for dear Clarissa's sake;" she had always had a true affection for her, and no doubt they would have been the best of friends, had no injudicious persons come between them at the first, and sown the seeds of discord and distrust ere they met! "I am sure, Mr. Grey," she said, blandly, in conclusion, "you who have had such large experience of life, need not to be told that it is a most unthankful office, that of stepmother. One is sure to be suspected, misconstrued, and unjustly blamed."

"I quite agree with your ladyship. I am aware that stepmothers, as a class, have much, very much, of which to complain. I know that they are often most unfairly censured, most cruelly belied. But in your own case, madam, I think you have nothing to complain of. Your treatment of your step-daughter was—I do not hesitate to say—*scandalous*! Had she come to real harm you would have been answerable, and you alone. From a child you wilfully irritated and tormented her; you would, if possible, have deprived her of her father's affection. After his death you refused to carry out his intentions with regard to her, though you knew that only procrastination and accident, so called, frustrated the fulfilment of those intentions, and that the settlement was the wish, probably the last wish, of your dying husband's heart! Left to your mercy, thrown on your charity, you made a servant of her, and associated her with your menials, while your own children, unchecked, unpunished, were allowed to insult and harass her at their will. Worst of all, you per-

mitted a low adventurer to persecute her with his hateful addresses; you allowed lies to circulate—I do not say you invented them, though it may be so—lies which were most detrimental to her reputation. You strove in every way to compromise her, to drive her, as a last resource, into the arms of a fellow not fit to wed your chamber-maid, if she were a decent woman. Ah! you see I know all—*all*, Lady Orwell! And I promise you the world shall know it too. All England shall know how the Countess-Dowager of Orwell behaved to her husband's daughter, and I think the world will not be slow to pronounce its verdict."

Rather to the surprise, and a good deal to the discomfort, of Mr. Grey, the lady burst into tears, genuine tears, and sobbed as if her heart would break. Were they tears of passion, of bitterness, or of real distress?

They were a union of all three. For the Countess was now severely tried. She had, as people said, speculated wildly, under the influence of Mr. Thompson, and had lost in nearly every venture. Her sons all gambled and betted recklessly; the two eldest, especially, were fools as well as knaves, and they had been plucked like geese, and fleeced like shorn sheep, by sundry of their low companions, who were nothing less than blacklegs and turf-sharpers. Her daughters were dull, plain girls, with what their acquaintances called *nasty tempers*. Their mother had weakly indulged them in their childhood, and taught them to over-estimate their charms and their importance, and now they rewarded her with cool contempt and habitual defiance of her commands. She had not the smallest comfort in any of her children. Sydney John, the drone and dolt of the family, gave her the least uneasiness; he could not be said to be "the best of the bunch;" he was only the least bad of the whole family.

The Earl, who was in the hands of the Jews, had counted upon large sums as available on his approaching majority; and finding how his mother had mismanaged his affairs, he bitterly reproached her, and declared that she had been the ruin of him. The estates were in the worst condition possible, and the handsome fortune which poor Peter had left her was almost entirely dissipated.

She had begun, too, to have the worst opinion of the *pseudo* Mr. Thompson, but she was so entirely in his power that she dared not quarrel with him, nor could she extricate her affairs from his control. Disappointment, humiliation, and suspicion met her at every turn, and her apprehensions increased and darkened as the weary days went on. She was emphatically a miserable woman. No wonder that her nerves gave way under the sudden surprise of Mr. Grey's stern accusations. For months past she had been slowly and reluctantly coming to the conclusion that her life had been a series of mistakes, and that all that she had striven for, and all that she had gained, was not worth the price she had paid for it. And now Clarissa was rich, and happy, and honoured; and she was poor, and wretched, and likely to be disgraced!

"If I had my time over again, I would do differently," she said, "indeed I would; but it is too late now."

"Never too late to repent of wrong; never too late to turn to God, and lead a Christian life!" replied Mr. Grey, greatly touched. "Christ calls you still—is calling you *now*! Oh, listen, and let your last days be your best and happiest. There is pardon and peace for all!"

Then he left her, feeling such unfeigned compassion for her miserable condition, as almost surprised himself. He left her without anger—almost without contempt. He was so very, very sorry for her when she wept, and wailed out, "I am a miserable woman!" Afterwards, he was most thankful that he had parted from her thus.

He went back to his inn and dined, and then strolled in the glorious Orwell woods till the sweet summer evening deepened into lovely summer night. The morrow's dawn had not broken, when he was awakened by a great disturbance in the street. He opened the window, and saw over the tree-tops a red glow on the sky. "Is it a fire?" he asked of someone below. "Yes!" was the answer—"a great fire! the Castle is in flames, and there are no engines nearer than Ipsleigh."

CHAPTER L.

MRS. JACK SPARKS.

“That night a mingled column of fire and smoke,
From the dark thickets of the forest broke,
And glaring o’er the landscape, leagues away,
Made all the fields and hamlets bright as day.
Wrapped in a sheet of flame the castle blazed,
And all the villagers in terror gazed.”

“CLANG! clang! Bome! bome! Ding-dong!” went the bells in the old ivied tower, as Mr. Grey hurried up the avenue, where he had loitered and mused so quietly fourteen hours before. The heavy bells were ringing backwards—or anyhow—a tocsin of distress. The sky was crimson, and the tree-tops showed like foliated masses of ruddy bronzes, in the awful glow that lighted up the scene. The rooks, roused from their nests in the tall elms, were wheeling round and round, while their discordant *caw* mingled with the strange jangle of the bells; the wild fowl rose from the sedges of the Mere, and screamed as if pursued; and the deer, terrified at the unwonted glare, went thundering across the open lawns and glades to find shelter in the more distant woods. Every moment the glow deepened, and the blaze grew brighter; and when, at length, Mr. Grey came in sight of the Castle, it seemed to him that the whole ancient edifice was in flames.

It was not so, however, for the old wing and a great part of the offices were as yet untouched; but in the more modern building, which was occupied by the family, and in which were the state-rooms, the fire raged furiously. The nursery and schoolroom quarters were wrapped in flames, which spread with frightful rapidity; long fiery tongues licked the window frames of the library, and the great dining-room was like a furnace. A crowd of people, composed of nearly every man and woman in the neighbourhood, was gathered together, but no one seemed to

have any idea of wrestling with the enemy. Indeed, the fire had so far got the mastery, that any such slight opposition as the Castle engine—a mere toy affair—could offer was manifestly useless. In its best days it might have been efficacious in the first moments of alarm, but it never could have coped with a well-established fire. Nevertheless, some of the servants had dragged it out and fixed the decayed hose, and one, more adventurous than the rest, had actually played upon the blazing mass. The sprinkle seemed rather to increase the fury of the flames, and it suddenly struck the beholders that they had better yield the victory to the awful foe, and devote themselves to the more possible work of salvage.

“What has to be done must be done quickly,” said the butler, taking the command. “There is not much that can be done, for the fire has got all the rooms where the chief of the valuables are, but there’s the pictures in the long gallery, and the armour—we might, if we are sharp about it, save them! And I must have a try for that *Chateau Yquem*. My plate is all safe. Come along, my lads—the way is clear to the gallery!”

But the fire spread so fast, and the heat and smoke soon became so intolerable, that the men were forced to abandon their work, and beat a quick retreat. They went to other parts of the house, where it was cooler, and the smoke less dense, and saved just what came to hand—chiefly old, discarded furniture and kitchen implements. The house-keeper and her maids rescued a little—only a very little—linen; for ere they left the presses the place was like an oven, and the fire had got hold of the adjoining still-room. Pieces of the splendid Sèvres dinner-service were also saved; the rest—by far the larger portion—had to be abandoned. As for the wine, it was useless to think of it, for the cellars in which it was stored were immediately under the rooms which was the very focus of the conflagration.

“Are the family all safe? Are the servants all right?” was Mr. Grey’s first question. He had often played the amateur fireman with equal bravery and skill, and he saw at once that in a few hours the vast pile would be one heap of ruin, unless the engines speedily arrived.

Salvage to a small extent was all that could be hazarded ; as well endeavour to quench heaven's thunderbolts as that great roaring, seething mass of fire, which consumed like tinder all upon which it fixed its demon fangs. But the family, the servants ! Was no human life in peril ?

"Lady Louisa Maria and Lady Selina went with some of the maids to the North Lodge directly the fire broke out," was the reply. "And Mr. Sydney was here a moment ago. See ! there he is—helping to bring out that japan cabinet."

"And the Countess-Dowager ?"

"She came down with her daughters. I saw her in her dressing-gown, with her hair all flying," said a woman from the village.

"She didn't go with the young ladies, though," interposed another, "for my husband was with them. Lady Selina fainted, and had to be carried."

Presently, up came our old friend Mademoiselle Coralie—mademoiselle no longer, for she had been married for some years to a thriving tradesman in Ipsleigh, who had a small branch business at Orwell, which Mrs. Draper chiefly managed herself. And Mrs. Draper cordially hated and despised the whole family of Orwell, Lady Clarissa excepted. But though her talk was loud, she did not really wish them any ill, and she was now most anxious to be certified of the safety of her *quondam* mistress. She had met the young ladies, and Lady Louisa Maria was crying, and begging someone to go and look after "mamma."

"For," said the girl, "she went back after some of her jewels, and it wasn't safe ; I told her so, but she would not heed ; the floors were giving way then. Oh, do go and see if she is safe ! It would be so dreadful if she were burned to death."

So Madame Coralie pressed on, to make inquiries.

"Ah ! she not burn !" said the Frenchwoman to herself, as she approached the scene of action ; "not *here*, that is to say ! She will burn for ever and ever in the other world ; being a heretic, she won't get the advantage of purgatory. It is of no avail to say masses for a heretic, even for a good heretic !—for the Church damns

them eternally. *Ma foi*, I would not be a heretic! But the Countess will take no hurt; she will live to be ninety-nine, as all horrid old witches do. It is the good and the gentle that are swept away!"

Nevertheless, her first inquiries were for the Countess-Dowager, and she arrived just as people were declaring that she had gone back into the Castle, and never come out again. Several persons began to be excited; Mr. Grey was seriously alarmed; he asked further questions, and became only more convinced that the unfortunate lady was still in the burning house.

"Which are Lady Orwell's rooms?" demanded Mr. Grey.

Fifty voices answered him; as many hands pointed in a direction where the fire was fiercest.

Madame Coralie shuddered.

"She is but a cinder, if she is in there!" she cried.

"She would never have gone back," said Mr. Grey. "It might be Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace, it scorches even here! Does no one know where the Countess-Dowager is likely to be?"

"I seed her," said a little kitchenmaid, who stood trembling, and keeping guard over some of her own belongings, which she had caught up in the moment of flight. "I seed her ladyship as I come down the cedar stairs. Our own stairs was so full of smoke, I was fear'd of being choked, and there she were, looking that scared it were awful. And I says, 'my lady,' but she says nothing, and I runned on, and the next minute I had lost her in the smoke."

"Could she get to her rooms that way?" asked Mr. Grey.

"Yes, she could," replied Madame Coralie. "I expect she found the grand corridor all on fire, and so turned back to the cedar landing, to try getting round through my lord's rooms, the other way."

"Show me the road to the cedar stairs," said Mr. Grey, imperatively. But someone was before him. Poor stupid Sydney John had listened to the kitchenmaid's avowal, and to Coralie's remarks, and the best part of his nature triumphed over the worst, and he was ready to

risk his own life for his mother's. He was already on the lower flight of the cedar stairs—so-called, because they led to a suite of apartments panelled with cedar wood—when Mr. Grey asked someone to direct him. Coralie at once led the way, impelled by a sudden bravery, and she reached the first landing, where the cedar planks were hot under her feet, and the smoke was gathering in thick volumes. But as yet there was no fire there, only the black dense vapour in one of the cedar chambers proclaimed the speedy advent of the flames.

"This way!" shouted Coralie. "*Ah ciel!* the fire is at the other end of the passage. *Pauvre miladi!* she is lost, lost." And the woman wrung her hands in utter horror and dismay. "*Allons! Fuyons!*" she cried, "or we too shall be roast!"

At that moment, pushing through the smoke and a fringe of fire, came a tall, loutish figure, all begrimed, and staggering under the burden he carried in his arms; it was the lad Sydney John, and he had saved his mother, whom he found crouching and apparently unconscious in one of the rooms that had been his father's, and through which there was access to the Countess's own suite.

Mr. Grey stepped forward to his assistance—for Sydney, though tall and large-boned, was little more than a boy, being scarcely over eighteen, and the Countess-Dowager was no light weight. They got her down the stairs, and into the kitchen-yard, where they sprinkled her well with water, and soon brought her in some measure to her senses. That is to say, she opened her eyes and twitched her fingers, and tried to sit up on the door-step, where they had hastily placed her. Her first words were incomprehensible.

"Jack! I said it would come, and it has! God's curse is upon us! What was it that Percy read the other day?"

"Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire, burn!"—

I forget the rest! Jack, I say, I like you very well, but I can't marry you. I mean to be a lady, and you'll never make me one. Yes, ma'am! carrots, fivepence a bunch!

—very scarce yet, but turnips is cheaper. A pen'north o' parsley—yes!"

"She is out of her mind," they said; "terror has turned her brain!" And so it had. The fire had not touched her, but the fright and distress had been too much for her already tortured mind. Reason had deserted its throne—never to return; from that awful night Louisa, Countess-Dowager of Orwell, was an incurable maniac. Sometimes she was desperate, and required restraint, and sometimes she was harmless, but seemed to have gone back to her Whitechapel days, and once more she served her neighbours with greengrocery, and made "two pen'norths" of coal, and bought cheap finery, and deplored cousin Jack's departure for Botany Bay. All the rest was a blank. She had forgotten both her husbands, and all her days of prosperity and grandeur were as if they had never been; she was Louisa Sparks again—nothing more! Only now and then, when the violent fits came on, it seemed as if dim reminiscences of her titled splendour visited her, and she asserted herself with more than her former arrogance and pride, and worked herself up into such a frenzy that the strait-waistcoat and the padded-room were called into requisition.

And all the while the fire marched on like a ruthless triumphant conqueror. It spread from room to room and from wing to wing; it slid along beam and rafter; it licked and charred the old cedar panelling, and the beautiful carved work for which Orwell was so famous; it crackled, and hissed, and roared, and mingled its spire-like flames with the red dawn light that was surging over all the sky. Just as the roof fell in, two engines came thundering up the avenue, and in less than half-an-hour three more were on the spot, and ready to set to work; but they could only play upon a burning heap; and when the fire at last was so far extinguished that it only smouldered, now and then sending out a flickering tongue of blaze, nothing remained of the grand old Castle of Orwell, save bare blackened walls, a few charred timbers, and battlements that tottered to their fall. The ruin was complete; of all the noble pile, only a small suite of servants' rooms, with offices beneath, escaped entire destruction.

As the day wore on, and the engine still played upon the red-hot *débris*, there arose a cry that the steward was missing. He had not been seen after the fire broke out, and strange to say, in the fright and confusion, no one had missed him. Only the butler, who had organised and commanded the salvage party, had inquired for him. It was clearly Mr. Thompson's duty to take the lead; but he did not put in an appearance, and there was no time to waste in calling him to the rescue, so they proceeded without him, the butler declaring that "the coward skulked, and was frightened at the smell of fire."

"Oh! he'll turn up at breakfast time, somewhere," said one of the grooms, as he leaped out of a window, as the shortest way to safety: "he'd never risk *his* precious carcass for the sake of anybody's property."

But the butler looked grave. "Hush, Tom!" he said; "this is no time for railing. I *hope* we are right—I do hope he *is* a coward, and that——"

"And that *what*?" asked the groom.

"That he is nowhere in the burning building."

"Why, he'd be burnt to death!"

And when breakfast time came, and food was served in the stable-yard to those who had worked all night, there was still no steward. And the hours wore on, and the engines, save one, went home to Ipsleigh, and the ruins were left to cool under the dews of heaven; and still no Mr. Thompson. As it grew towards evening the Honourable Sydney John went and conferred with the stranger at the Orwell Arms—the gentleman who had helped him with his mother, and whom people were saying was Clarissa's uncle.

"I say!" said Sydney John, "this is a rum go! Why don't Thompson turn up? Why didn't he show last night when everybody wanted him?"

"I really cannot say," replied Mr. Grey, much amused at the youth's *gaucherie*. "You see, I know nothing of Mr. Thompson's habits. He is house-steward and land-steward in combination, is he not?"

"He is everything that he can be, and he rules the roast when Orwell is away. As for mother, he's got her under his thumb; she never knocks under to anybody

but Thompson and Orwell; and, of the two, she's most afraid of Thompson."

"Strange that a mistress should be afraid of her own servant."

"So it is! Now I come to think of it, it's *very* strange. Why! she always seemed afraid of him ever since he came—more than twelve years ago, when I was a little chap, just out of petticoats. And at the same time they were dreadful intimate, thick as thieves!"

Mr. Grey said nothing. He had heard strange rumours, both at Ipsleigh and at Orwell, and he knew that whispers were afloat, very much to the Countess's discredit. Old as she was, it was her turn now to become the subject of scandal; she was ten times more talked about than ever Clarissa, in spite of wicked slander, had been. So many persons said that there had been, *or ought to be*, a private marriage between her and the steward, who presumed to quarrel with her ladyship, and even called her "*Loo!*"

Sydney proceeded: "I say, now, Mr. Grey, it's one of two things—either the fellow is roasted to cinders, or else, he's—*bolted!* And if he's bolted, I shouldn't be surprised if he set fire to the place before he went."

"Had you any reason to suspect that he intended bolting?"

"I hadn't at the time, but since, putting two and two together, it seems to me as if it might be so. My lady and he had an awful row yesterday, after you went away; and I know Orwell was determined to come to a settlement with him, and had told him so. I say! if he has *mizzled*, and gone off to foreign parts, it will be bad for us, for he would never go empty-handed!" And the Honourable Sydney felt quite proud of his own sagacity—for people had always called him "dull."

Of course, Mr. Grey could not offer an opinion; he could only suggest that inquiries should be set on foot immediately, and that the ruins should be carefully examined as soon as practicable.

If any deeds or securities were missing, that would, of course, go far to prove that Thompson had absconded. It

was even reported that he had been seen at Hunsleigh Port, in the early morning, while the sky was yet red with the glow from the burning Castle, but no one could be found who had actually beheld him; it was always somebody who had told somebody else, that somebody had recognised the missing man.

Nevertheless days passed on, and there were no tidings of Mr. Thompson, and a week had elapsed since his disappearance, when one morning an elderly woman arrived in the village, and betook herself to "The Orwell Arms," where, after partaking of some spirits and water, she commenced, "I'm come to know about my husband! I've let him go long enough, and now folks do say he's either burnt to death, or gone out of the country with what don't belong to him, so I am here to look after him, for I'm his lawful wife!"

The hostess suggested that the lady should name her lord, although she felt pretty certain to whom the inquiry related, since only one person was in the circumstances referred to,—burnt, or missing. Only no one in Orwell Magna knew that Mr. Thompson was a married man. In the meantime, however, she summoned Mr. Grey and Mr. Sydney—who was with him, discussing matters, as usual—to the conference. The woman replied, "His name is, or it were, Jack Sparks; but he were always called Mr. Thompson here; and he were house-steward to his own cousin, the Countess of Orwell."

"Mr. Thompson own cousin to my mother!" cried Sydney, in amaze. Then, turning to Mr. Grey: "I say, now, I do believe it's the truth! There's a lot of things to prove it."

"It's truth enough," responded Mrs. Sparks. "The Countess, afore she were Mrs. Shrosbery, were a Miss Sparks, and lived down Whitechapel way. Her ma sold greengrocery, and her pa weren't nothing in particular; he was one, I've heard my Jack say, as would never earn his salt, if you gave him bread and cheese."

"Upon my word," said Sydney John, "I seem to have had not very respectable grandparents; and pray, Mrs. Sparks, what induced your husband to alter his name?"

"Why, in course, Loo—that is, the Countess—wouldn't, for the world, have let it be known who she was, and how she grew up, in the gutter, as one may say. And she hated the name of Sparks, and my good man, he never were over fond of it, and as often called himself something else as not. And he and my lady made a paction; she would give him a place of trust, and good pay, and generous perquisites, and he would serve her faithful, and never peach. And they was always to be as mistress and servant. I guess they forgot themselves sometimes, though. Well! that was more nor twelve years back, and for a long time I didn't know where my husband was; but he sent me money, and I never was so well off in my life; I were quite the lady, that I were! And as we had never hit it off very well, we were quite as well parted as not. Folks thought I were a widow; and I often wished I were, for I could have married more than once, and done well for myself, I could. But latterly I haven't had my money regular, and I've been obligated to go out nurse-tending, to keep myself from want, and now I hear as he's missing; and, thinks I, I've played the fool too long, I'll go and look after him; for Thompson or Sparks, he's my lawful husband, and I've more right to him than his lady-cousin."

It was not easy to dispose of Mrs. Sparks, for she swore she would not stir a step till her liege lord was at her side again, and she threatened to become a nuisance. She demanded to be confronted with the Countess; but that unhappy lady was in no state to receive her, for her malady had increased so visibly that it became necessary to place her at once under proper treatment. Fortunately, at this crisis, the Earl and his wife made their appearance; also Mr. Oakleigh, who had been at Baden-Baden when the news of the calamity reached him. Lord and Lady Orweil came straight from Paris; owing to some delay of letters they had only just received their brother Sydney's.

Mr. Grey thought he might now safely leave affairs in the hands of those whom they actually concerned, so he sat down to finish the letter, already commenced, to Clarissa and her husband—a letter which was quite a little

autobiography, and fully explained all that required an explanation.

But he stayed till the ruins had been thoroughly explored, and, as far as could be ascertained, no human remains were to be discovered, though, as it was affirmed by all who were judges in such matters, the heat had been so very fierce that it was quite possible that the bones were calcined, and no trace left of the ill-fated steward—if, indeed, he had perished in the flames. His wife, however, inclined to the belief that he had fled the country—a supposition which the young Earl also entertained, and in which he was confirmed when he came to investigate his own affairs. Of course, all the steward's papers and accounts were burnt; but that was not all: deeds, bonds, securities, and documents of importance were missing; and the Earl soon made the discovery that he was more completely ruined than ever his father had been, without the alternative of marrying a rich widow.

Mr. Grey grew sick as villainy after villainy was disclosed, and when it came to the Earl coolly asking him, on the score of "relationship!" to lend him £10,000, he thought it was high time to beat a retreat and disconnect himself entirely from the Orwell perplexities. He had heard from Clarissa, and there was no reason why he should any longer delay his journey to Brightlands Rectory.

CHAPTER LI.

SHADES OF EVENING.

“Nearer, my God, to Thee,
 Nearer to Thee,
 E’en though it be a cross
 That raiseth me;
 Still all my song shall be,
 Nearer, my God, to Thee,
 Nearer to Thee.”

It was rest and comfort indeed to be at Brightland Rectory, after the disturbed and troublous atmosphere of Orwell, and Mr. Grey had not been many days in his niece's family before he began to think it was just possible he might not care to return to America. “Suppose I were to make up my mind to stop here always—that is to say, in England,” said he one day to Clarissa; “do you think you could find me a cottage near at hand?” He had told the Willoughbys that he was *not poor*, but as yet he had said no word about his riches, and they simply supposed that he had a competency, and nothing more. They had given him a warm and hearty welcome on his arrival, and as time passed on they became extremely fond of him, and hoped that he would defer his departure till the latest possible moment. Clarissa answered, “I am not sure, Uncle Edward, that there is any house in the village that would just suit you; there is nothing to let, or likely to be let, except a large mansion, and several small and inconvenient cottages, hardly fit for working people. But I do not see why you should not stay on with us; the Rectory is quite too large for our occupation. Suppose we fitted up those two south rooms, which I showed you the other day, given over to dust and lumber? Horace will never get on without you, now that he has been used to have a lay curate and honorary churchwarden; and as for the children, they would miss you dreadfully.”

“And how about yourself, Clary dear?”

"You know very well, uncle, that I only want you to consent to my plan in order to be *quite* happy. Indeed, Horace and I have spoken about it already; only last night he said to me, 'If we could but keep your Uncle Edward with us as long as he lives, how glad I should be!'"

"All very well, child, but suppose I cannot afford to pay you liberally for my board and lodging? And Edward Grey could never bear to be dependent upon his kith and kin while he had the ability to work for himself."

"Oh, as to that, it would be worth anything to Horace to have such a coadjutor in his parish work. There is so much to be done; this place has been so shamefully neglected. I am sure it could be arranged, Uncle Edward; whatever suited you would suit us. You shall pay us something—if it would make you feel more comfortable—or nothing, just as you choose. We are not at all poor, you know."

"Some ladies of your rank would think themselves extremely poor with your moderate income."

"Yes, yes, I dare say! But then I have known what it is to be really poor! I have been obliged to consider every sixpence before I spent it; I have known what it is to toil far into the night for the sake of a few shillings, to make scanty meals, and to wear old clothes, till it seemed hopeless trying to mend them any longer. And, once, I remember, I could not go out till after dark, because I had no boots that were at all respectable. Thank God, those days are passed. Ah! I am rich now, with my dear husband and children, and this sweet, pleasant, home, and all my wants fully—more than fully—supplied."

"Did you ever quite lose faith, Clarissa?"

"Now and then I am afraid I did. But the despondency, the darkness, never lasted; God had pity on me, and would not let me be tried too hardly. The worst time was just before I left the Castle, and when I could not feel sure that it would be right to run away and find some other home. Ah, God has been very good to me! I may say—if anyone may—'Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life!'"

"And yet the discipline of your youth was very severe; you bore the yoke for long, and a heavy yoke, too."

"I needed it. Never was a prouder, more self-willed child than I! Poor Lady Orwell did not altogether slander me when she complained of my pride and obstinacy. I am quite sure I tried her sadly, and she never had a very gentle temper. Though I believe she made me worse than I should have been; she seemed to take advantage of all my defects of character and of training—for I was left entirely to servants, after mamma died. Well, I dare say we mutually tormented each other; I have often thought I ought to have had more patience with her. And now—now that such terrible misfortunes have overtaken her, I feel that I forgive her, from the bottom of my heart, every act of unkindness, every harsh and bitter word."

"You are better to her than her own sons—the Earl especially. I was absolutely horrified to hear him speak of his wretched mother in the way he did. I took the liberty of reminding him that whatever were her follies and her errors, she was still his *mother*, and as such to be regarded with at least a show of reverence. He burst into a horse-laugh, and replied that reverence of any sort was not in his nature, and that as for his mother, she had been his ruin and his shame, and he felt towards her only aversion and contempt."

"How shocking! And he was her darling! The one good point in her character—the one, at least, that could not be overlooked—was devotion to her children. She spoiled them, I know; but she *loved* them. And now that I am a mother myself, I feel, in spite of her wrong-doing and her shortcomings, that she must have loved them passionately. Ah! if my boy should ever live to despise his mother!"

"He never will, my dear. Bring him up wisely; teach him early to walk in God's ways, to live for others rather than for himself; show him the beauty of holiness, set him a worthy example—in short, go on as you have begun, and there is no fear that he will ever cherish any sentiments save those of tender and reverent affection

towards you. But Lord Orwell and his brothers behaved very badly towards yourself, did they not ? ”

“ They were but children, and they were encouraged to set me at defiance. It would have been a miracle had they been other than they were. I have no grudge against them, poor boys.”

“ And that infamous Chatters ? ”

“ I had rather not speak of him. I was so shocked one day at seeing him in the pulpit. Horace and I were staying at Westonbury one wet Sunday, and we turned into the first church we came to, and had taken our seats, before I perceived that the officiating minister was my ancient enemy. He read our beautiful prayers in most slovenly fashion, and, by way of sermon, he hurried over what was evidently a printed discourse, for once or twice he lost his place, and was unable to proceed. I heard afterwards that he was not unfrequently seen in a state of intoxication, and that he lived most unhappily with his wife, who had just and grave cause of complaint against him. Still, I *hope*, I would do Alfred Chatters good, if it were possible ; I would not resent the wrongs and indignities of that unhappy time, if ever I had the chance.”

And strange to say, years afterwards, Clarissa did have the chance. There came a day that found Chatters bereft of reputation, friends, health, and means, when he was thankful to receive an alms from the generous woman whom he had once so cruelly persecuted. His last days were soothed by Clarissa’s kindness, and when he died, a miserable, worn-out, prematurely aged man, she established his widow in a small business, and placed three of his four children in situations where they might, if they conducted themselves well, take the first steps towards an honourable career. Chatters’ eldest son, to this day, speaks with reverential affection of the Lady Clarissa, the friend and protector and “ guardian angel ” of his youth.

Mr. Grey finally accepted his niece’s invitation, but he insisted on furnishing his own rooms for himself ; he could very well afford it, he assured her. He chose his opportunity when Clarissa and her husband were absent on a short visit, and not content with filling the chambers

destined to his own peculiar use with every possible comfort and elegance, he had a new grand pianoforte placed in Clarissa's sitting-room, while a beautiful inlaid cabinet decorated the drawing-room, and Horace's library received sundry valuable and long-desired additions.

Clarissa could scarcely believe the evidence of her senses when she beheld the rooms, which she had seen last faded, dull, and filled only with discarded furniture and old boxes. Either her uncle was wealthy or else alarmingly extravagant, and the latter supposition, from a variety of causes, it seemed impossible to entertain. He had simply said he should prefer to furnish his own rooms, and he could very well afford it, and Clarissa, with true delicacy, determined that he should have his own way, and that she would presently add all those little comforts and luxuries which he was himself unable to supply. But no additions were required, and everything in the rooms was of the very best and costliest; a London upholsterer had evidently been employed, and nothing was forgotten that the capacities of the time afforded. Mr. Willoughby and his wife were equally astonished; they could only conclude that Uncle Edward's estimate of "moderate means" must be somewhat singular.

It was on the morning after their return that they first entered the newly-furnished rooms, and before Clarissa had observed the new piano, as she had only glanced into her boudoir the night before, with a chamber-candlestick in her hand. Neither had Horace seen the precious volumes which lay on his library-table, awaiting his arrangement. They were alone for several minutes, for Uncle Edward had purposely lingered behind when he proposed the visit. Husband and wife looked at each other in uncontrolled wonder, and Clarissa exclaimed, "What does it mean? more has been spent on these two rooms than on many a large, respectably-furnished house! These things must have cost an immense sum—immense, that is, for Uncle Edward, who is comparatively poor."

"He never said he was poor," said Horace, meditatively; "on the contrary, he has several times distinctly affirmed that he was 'well off,' and I supposed that to mean—not exactly affluence, but mere comfortable cir-

cumstances, especially for an old bachelor, almost certain never to marry, or require increase of income. Why! these pictures and these mosaics alone are worth a small fortune; that sandal-wood and silver cabinet, I imagine, he brought from India. And here is his dressing-case; I suppose we may look into it, as we come on a tour of inspection. Yes! actually gold fittings and jewelled stoppers; and the case itself is a rare piece of workmanship. Diamond rings and studs, too! And a 'repeater,' with chain and seals, worth several hundred pounds! Truly, Uncle Edward's estimate of 'moderate means' is, to say the least of it, *extraordinary!*"

"Horace, did I ever tell you of a strange dream I had at Hunsleigh Port the day I left Orwell?"

"Yes, you did. You told me before we were married. What about that dream?"

"It was a queer, jumbled dream, inconsistent and impossible, as dreams generally are; but I have always remembered it. You know how the angel that comforted me turned into, or was replaced, rather, by a mortal creature like myself—an elderly, grey-haired man, with beautiful, kind eyes, and of noble, benevolent aspect. Well, the first time I ever saw Uncle Edward, I was reminded of my dream; and ever since, I have thought he *might* be the friend whom I then met in vision. Only now, I do not want a friend, for I have you to take care of me, and I am more than content with the blessings I enjoy. There he comes."

"Well," said Mr. Grey, entering, "how do you young people like the old man's fancy? Are the rooms English enough for your taste, Clarissa?"

"They are perfect," she replied; "absolutely perfect. But so much perfection must have involved a commensurate outlay. I know what things cost pretty well."

"Don't look so grave, my pretty bird; the old uncle can afford it all—ay, and twenty times as much, and yet not be guilty of extravagance."

"Then you are—not at all—*poor*?"

"Certainly not. I never pleaded poverty, Clarissa."

"I know you did not. But somehow I seemed to understand, and so did Horace, that you were only toler-

ably well off. I thought perhaps you might have two hundred a-year, or thereabouts, when you insisted on paying all the expenses connected with these rooms, which I supposed you would furnish quite simply. Horace and I fully intended supplementing your own purchases with a few small luxuries, such as we thought an elderly person might really need; but our whole year's income would not have been sufficient to pay for a quarter of these lovely things. Are you rich, then, Uncle Edward?"

"Yes, Clarissa, I am so rich that I hardly know what I am really worth. It has pleased God to crown my labours with success. He has made me the steward of great wealth, and I tremble when I think how large is my responsibility—for all I have and am is the Lord's; and it behoves me, as His loving, faithful servant, to spend and to be spent for Him. And now, Clarissa and Horace, I call upon you to share that responsibility, for mine is yours, my children; and may we all so live to God's glory, that at the last He may say, 'Well done, good and faithful servants! Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'"

And from that day till he died, full of years and ripe for glory, Edward Grey and his niece and nephew, and their children, made one happy family.

They did not forsake the work which they had taken in hand. Lady Clarissa was one of the greatest heiresses of her day, and she lived according to her state and rank, and kept up such an establishment as became her station—that station to which it had pleased God to call her. But there was no lavish expenditure on self, no mere spending for self-glory or self-aggrandisement. All was done "decently and in order," and that, in its broadest sense, means a great deal. Neither was there lavish and indiscriminate *giving*; the sick, the aged, and the weak were helped bountifully; but those who could help themselves were put in the best way of doing it, and taught and encouraged to maintain their independence.

Large estates were bought, not that they might add field to field, and land to land, but that "the people"—the "masses" in the rural districts—might be cared for,

and taught to care for themselves. There was no indiscriminate dole of beef and blankets at Christmas-time, though the poor and needy were never sent away empty-handed; but, on the other hand, there were on the Willoughby Manors no fever-breeding cottages, no picturesque but wretched hovels for the encouragement of vice and indecency; no dunghills at the doors, no miserable children driven out in snowy winter mornings, to supplement by a few weekly *pence* their father's hard-earned *shillings*.

The Willoughbys let their farms at reasonable rates, and on fair terms, on the understanding that the labourers should be paid a fair wage, on which they could live in comfort, and bring up their children respectably. For they did not believe that a labourer *could* honestly support a wife and family on nine shillings a week, notwithstanding the Christmas dole from the Great House, and the blankets, and broth, and port wine, in case of sickness—which some lords and ladies of the soil, even to this day, falsely imagine to be *charity*—which make amends for all sorts of defalcations in the matter of actual wages. Wages—just wages—the Willoughbys take to be the labouring man's *right*, quite as much as the rent of houses and lands which they own is theirs. And *charity*, in the popular acceptance of the term, they take to be an insult to the able-bodied, industrious man, who is willing to do a good day's work for a good day's wage. To every man his due, not his mere stint; to the feeble and infirm, and suffering, that substantial sympathy and kindly assistance which the Master Himself taught and imposed as a primary Christian duty, when He said, "Inasmuch as ye did it, *or did it not*, &c.!"

I have often thought of late, when I have heard good people disputing about the dogma of eternal punishment, how little some of them think of the faults, the true nature of the faults, for which those on the left hand were condemned. It is not, "Come, ye blessed of My Father," or "Depart from Me, ye cursed," because of this or that *belief*, or because of this or that *non-belief*! Faith is implied, of course, because, if one does works of love, as unto Christ, one must necessarily believe in Christ, the

Saviour, the great Exemplar of the world. But here, in this parable, Christ does not insist on creeds, or dogmas, or systems of religion. He rewards and He punishes "according to every man's work;" the work being the natural outcome of that faith which alone deserves the name, and which, in the last great day, will be owned of the Lord, when the faith of mere sentiment and emotion, and even of conviction, will perish everlastingly. I fear that in that day of His appearing some, who have made a great noise about believing, and who have loudly despised *doing* as "deadly sin," may find themselves, to their infinite horror, in the category of the condemned. Let us only question ourselves of that which no one can answer for us:—Is ours the dead faith which, neither blossoming nor bearing fruit, is a mockery of all that Christ taught? Are we of those who, hearing Christ's sayings, and *doing* them not, must be likened to the foolish hearer, who built his house upon the sand?

"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

That was Christ's teaching. But methinks if our Lord came again to earth in mortal guise, and preached as He preached on the plains and mountains, and by the shores of Galilee, there are many who, making loud profession of His name, and thinking themselves "*Believers*" above all others, would turn from Him as from a mere teacher of morality, a Christian philosopher, a setter-forth of salvation by works! I am not sure but that some, in their righteous displeasure, would not warn men against Him, declaring that He preached *not* the "pure Gospel." Nay, I am afraid, He might even be stigmatised as a *Unitarian*! For the men of the present day, who dare to say "Follow Christ," as well as "Believe in Christ," do occasionally incur that which is intended to be the very climax of rebuke.

Lady Orwell lived to old age in the retreat to which she was consigned soon after that dreadful night, the terrors of which deprived her of her reason. The Castle was never rebuilt; the Earl, compelled to reside on the Continent, fell in a duel, originating in a gambling dispute.

He died childless, as did his brother Augustus, who succeeded to the title. Sydney John, whom his companions called "Lackland," lived chiefly in Switzerland—in obscurity, but in more respectability than his brothers. His wife was a charming young peasant of Zurich, and she had but vague ideas of her husband's actual rank; to the day of her death she never knew that she was Madame la Comtesse. She brought him half-a-dozen daughters, who all grew up and married well in their own country; but no son was ever born to the honours of Lord Fordham. Percival, "poor Percy," as his sisters always called him, was the victim of incurable hip and spinal disease; he died at comparatively early age, unmarried, and so the title was extinct. The girls themselves were left as portionless as ever Clarissa had been, and but for their elder sister's generosity, they must have decided between actual want or going out into the world to earn a livelihood. Only the youngest, Lady Adeline, married; Louisa Maria and Selina became grim, soured spinsters of that type which has rendered old-maidism an unjust reproach. And while they owed all that they had to Clarissa, they hated her for her wealth, her family joys, and the great esteem in which she was held by all who were honoured with her friendship.

More than once Captain Brown was a welcome guest at Brightlands Rectory, and Mrs. Tibbs received many substantial tokens of regard from Lady Clarissa, whom she had entertained as an angel, unawares. Mr. and Mrs. Saunders were helped in their business, and became so prosperous that the retail trade was gradually abandoned, and the shop gave place to the wholesale City warehouse. Their children were well-educated, and took a superior position in society. And the "fifty-nine pounds fourteen shillings and sixpence," which had been good Mrs. Sweetapple's parting gift, was returned with more than compound interest to her grandchildren. Lady Clarissa never forgot one humble friend; all who had ever shown her kindness were sought out and gratefully remembered in the days of her prosperity.

In order to perpetuate Susan's dear memory she founded a village school for girls, which should bear through all

time the name of her to whom she owed so much. That would be more in keeping with Susan's character and wishes, she told her uncle and her husband, than erecting a marble monument, or giving to Orwell or Brightlands Church a grand memorial window. And one old friend—the Mrs. Grandison who had learned the first lessons in Christ's school on the quiet Southbourne shore—owned that it was indeed as Clarissa said. Mrs. Grandison had become very poor, as regards the silver and gold of the world, but she was rich in the treasure laid up where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt. Always she spoke with reverential gratitude of Susan Shrosbery, who was never ashamed to own her Lord, and who bore such simple, humble testimony to Christianity; Susan, whose work lived after her in the person of those whom she had won by precept and example to the Master's cause.

Lady Clarissa still lives, an old woman now, surrounded by her children and her children's children. Her husband has gone before her to the heavenly world, and she waits in peace and patience for her dismissal hence. She remembers all the way through the wilderness by which the Lord her God has led her; she cries with the Psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes." Her heart is full of a quiet joy, that ever deepens and widens, as the evening shadows fall around her, and her favourite song is, "Nearer, my God, to Thee!" And still she loves to say, speaking now in the past tense, "Surely goodness and mercy *have followed* me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever and ever."

THE END.

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